

**VIOLENCE ON THE BORDER: KEEPING U.S.
PERSONNEL SAFE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS**

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CONTENTS

Hearing held on September 9, 2015	Page 1
WITNESSES	
The Hon. Gregory B. Starr, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State	
Oral Statement	8
Written Statement	9
Ambassador William H. Moser, Deputy Director, Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, U.S. Department of State	
Oral Statement	9
Written Statement	10
Ms. Sue Saarnio, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State	
Oral Statement	10
Written Statement	12
Mr. Robert L. Harris, Director, Joint Task Force-West, U.S. Customs and Border Protection	
Oral Statement	12
Written Statement	13
Mr. Brandon Judd, President, National Border Patrol Council, American Federation of Government Employees	
Oral Statement	13
Written Statement	15
APPENDIX	
Mexico 2015 Crime and Safety Report: Mexico City	56
Letter to Congressman Cummings from Alejandro Estivill	72
Statement of Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney	73

VIOLENCE ON THE BORDER: KEEPING U.S. PERSONNEL SAFE

Wednesday, September 9, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Jason Chaffetz [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Chaffetz, Mica, Jordan, Amash, Gosar, DesJarlais, Farenthold, Massie, Meadows, DeSantis, Mulvaney, Buck, Walker, Blum, Hice, Russell, Carter, Grothman, Hurd, Palmer, Cummings, Maloney, Norton, Clay, Lynch, Connolly, Cartwright, Kelly, Plaskett, DeSaulnier, Welch, Lujan Grisham, and Cuellar.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Good morning. The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform will come to order. And without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

We have a very important hearing today. Appreciate you joining us. The title of this hearing, "Violence on the Border: Keeping the U.S. Personnel Safe."

The United States is Mexico's largest trading partner and largest foreign investor. Mexico is the United States' third largest trading partner after Canada and China and is this country's second largest foreign supplier of petroleum.

We have a lot of familial ties. We have people who have loved ones there. It's a great place to travel. It's one of the more beautiful places on the planet, a lot of recreation. A lot of reasons, good reasons to interact with the good people of Mexico and to enjoy one of the most amazing countries that is on the border of the United States of America. It is one of the busiest and most economically important borders in the world, with nearly 1 million legitimate travelers and nearly \$1 billion worth of goods legally crossing the border each day.

But Mexico is also a dangerous place. I would argue it's one of the most dangerous places on the planet. To understand how dangerous it is, we don't have to look further than the State Department's own warnings about travel to Mexico. Specifically, the State Department warns, "Gun battles between rival criminal organizations or with Mexican authorities have occurred in broad daylight on streets. Criminal organizations have created road blocks to prevent the military and police from responding to criminal activity. Carjacking and highway robbery are serious problems in many

parts of the border region, and U.S. citizens have been murdered in such incidents.”

According to the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Nuevo Laredo’s municipal police was suspended in July of 2011, “among allegations of large-scale corruption.” Benjamin Galvan Gomez, who had been the mayor of Nuevo Laredo until 2013, disappeared on the night of February 27, 2014, near his house, along with businessman Miguel Angel Ortiz.

Prosecutors say that Galvan was kidnapped in Nuevo Laredo, killed and dumped near Monterrey about 135 miles south to the state of Nuevo Leon. Their bodies were found in the trunk of a car on March 1, 2014, according to press reports. In June of 2012, a bomb exploded in Galvan’s parking spot at City Hall, killing one bystander and injuring others.

The month before, cartel members left the decapitated bodies of 14 people in a van in front of City Hall accompanied by the banner that claimed to be from Joaquin El Chapo Guzman, leader of the Sinaloa cartel. The banner threatened Galvan and accused him of working with the Zetas.

In February 2013, the police chief of Nuevo Laredo disappeared, and his two brothers were found dead in the trunk of a car in Nuevo Laredo. Just yesterday—I happen to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and further to the south there’s an article out about an LDS Mission President. Somebody from the United States, actually from my district, going down and serving a religious mission who was shot during a robbery in Mexico. It is a violent place, a dangerous place.

The lawlessness is a direct result of drug cartels operating in Mexico evolving into massive criminal organizations. These cartels have expanded their operations into kidnapping, extortion, and murder. Unfortunately, this is not new news. It has been going on for some time. According to the National Border Patrol Councils—we’ll hear testimony today—“The official death toll from cartel violence in Mexico is 60,000. However, the unofficial death toll in Mexico is over 120,000 killed and another 27,000 missing or presumed dead.”

Mexico ranked 103rd out of 175 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries and terrorists based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. It’s in company of Algeria, China, Bolivia, Moldova, and Niger. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace ranking of countries from least to most violent, Mexico was 144 out of 162 countries surveyed, being similar to Lebanon and Colombia and others in terms of violence in 2015.

Today, the Department still operates nine consulates in an embassy in Mexico City. Two of those consulates, just south of the United States border, are of particular interest in today’s hearing. Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo, where I’ve been able to visit the Nuevo Laredo facility, both consulates operate directly across the Rio Grande River from the United States despite the State Department’s warning, “Violent criminal activity occurs more frequently along the northern border.”

In attempt to approve safety of our personnel in those consulates, the Department is set to build new consulate compounds in both

Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo. Despite these plans, construction has been long delayed. Both of these facilities are being constructed under the Department's design excellence initiative.

Design excellence takes longer than the standard embassy design, which has been used successfully by State in previous years. Several independent studies have gone and shown that they build them faster and less expensive. Unfortunately, the State Department, under President Obama and Secretary Clinton, changed the way we do this. They're now more expensive, they're slower, and consequently, we keep more people in danger for long periods of time.

Given State's own warnings about the danger Mexico poses to U.S. citizens and officials, it seems that building these facilities should be a priority; yet, it has been a fiasco over the last few years. Construction will not be completed until November 2017 in Nuevo Laredo and until spring of 2019 in Matamoros.

We had a chance, Stacey Plaskett and I, had a chance to visit the embassy in Mexico City. State Department entered into a contract in Mexico City to purchase from Colgate-Palmolive a \$120 million piece of land to build a new embassy. We have paid roughly half of that, \$60 million to Colgate-Palmolive. But the transfer does not complete until Colgate-Palmolive cleans up the site of all contaminants as approved by the Mexican environmental authorities.

But the place that they decided to buy—and we have documentation of this—was a brownfield. It was dirty. It was toxic. It was not ready to be built on. They thought they could clean it up, but it continues to be so dirty today that the Mexican Government will not approve it because it's too toxic.

So we have an older facility that's not adequately fortified. We have massive growth—massive growth in the number of personnel that they want to go into this embassy, and the construction costs have jumped 38 percent to \$763 million. In fact, if you look at the total costs, including the site acquisition, design and construction, we're looking at \$943 million to build this embassy that is now years behind.

Part of the reason that increase that's happening there is the number of desks. The number of desks projected at the beginning was going to be 891; now it's 1,335. Why the increased number of desks? In large part because of the security problems in Mexico. Yes, we do increase the amount of trade, but we need more security personnel to do the assessments from all the various agencies. This puts the total at roughly \$706,000 per desk.

Now, the original embassy in Mexico City was scheduled to be completed in February of 2019, but we're looking at least middle of 2020, if not further. It has still—still to this day not been approved by the Mexican Government. The money has been paid, but we're not able to move into that new facility. And it's totally unacceptable.

The State Department also recently indicated it plans to take away danger pay allocations for U.S. personnel who have been receiving it in Mexico. Danger pay is additional money provided to State Department employees who are willing to work in a particularly dangerous area. It defies logic for the State Department to

warn Americans about the high risk of danger—high risk in danger and traveling in Mexico but to end danger pay for diplomats here.

Behind the scenes, the State Department says, “Oh, don’t worry about it. Don’t worry about it. They’ll be taken care of.” Having traveled to Mexico a couple of times now and talking to State Department personnel, it’s right at the top of their plate. Right at the top of their issue. Don’t take away our danger pay.

You have people who work in the consulate in Nuevo Laredo directly across the border who have literally just a couple of square miles of which they can move. I’ve talked to the State Department personnel who cannot freely go out and shop or go to a movie or do anything other than stay on that compound because of the extreme violence and danger, and yet the State Department wants to take away that danger pay.

We have people who are shaking their heads saying, “Oh, that is silly. That’s ridiculous.” But you know what? How ironic that the House Republicans are fighting to help keep the danger pay for the State Department employees. And they want to change that in Mexico. And that doesn’t make sense to us. We’re going to explore that.

Crime in northern Mexico has already impacted U.S. assets in the country. On June 7, a truck leaving the United States consulate in Matamoros was hijacked by armed robbers. The hijackers stole more than 11,500 U.S. border crossing cards, which are visas that can be used to enter the United States. Some of these were recovered, but nearly 2,000 of these cards and a dozen passport cards are still missing.

The hijacking of this truck should come as no surprise to the State Department. The Department’s own travel warning makes it clear that, “No highway route through Tamaulipas,” which is the state, which includes Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo, “are considered safe.”

American assets in the sky are also at risk. In June, members of the Zeta cartel were shot at at a Customs and Border Patrol helicopter, hitting it twice and forcing it to land near Laredo, Texas. I’ve seen that helicopter. I talked to the pilot. I talked to the other gentleman who was on that helicopter. They were on the United States side of the border but taking fire from the Mexican side of the border, a pretty brazen attack on a U.S. helicopter doing patrol on the United States side of the border.

Previous to that there were attacks on Mexican helicopters from drug cartel members. It actually took down a helicopter in another part of Mexico. While no one was injured, this attack made it clear that cartels have no reservations about expanding the scope of their violence on the American side of the border. Danger and violence in Mexico is apparently not much of a priority for this administration.

Secretary Kerry, I understand he’s got a busy job. But here we have one of the most important partners; the most important relationships that we have in the world is with Mexico. And in the 29 months since Secretary Kerry has been the Secretary of State, how many times has he visited Mexico? One time. It’s not a priority for this administration.

Instead, they're taking away danger pay. They're trying to make the case that, "Oh, it's all safe. Everything's good here." And yet, I've got an LDS Mission president who was shot yesterday. I've got border patrol agents that are being shot out of the sky. I've got people who know that there are violent—by the tens of thousands of people being killed on that side of the border.

And we, as the United States of America, need to do better. We have to do better. They're our next door neighbors. There's over 100 million people there. That demands a little bit more attention from the Secretary than one quick visit down there. It makes me wonder whether they want Americans to think things are fine and safe for America, and it's hard to understand why so little diplomatic effort had been there.

We have a lot to discuss today. Very frustrated with the State Department and the requests made on July 15. We had sent a letter. It barely goes on to the second page. We had four asks. And on Friday, before this hearing, going into Labor Day weekend, State Department dumped on our desk 110,000 documents. Couldn't do a rolling production. Couldn't allow their staff to pour through this.

But this is how the State Department acts with the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. So we'll digest that. But to dump 110,000 documents, honest. Friday, right before Labor Day, we're coming into this hearing. You all knew that we had this. Come on. Really? You expect that to go unnoticed? Unacceptable. Unacceptable.

My question for the panel today, do we have all the documents? I want you to certify and tell me that I have everything I asked for. And that will be one of my first questions.

Yield to now the gentleman from—our ranking member, Mr. Cummings, from Maryland, for his opening statement.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for holding this hearing today. And as I listen to you, I'm hoping that our witnesses listen very carefully. I think you raised some legitimate concerns and I'm hoping that they will address them.

I also want to thank Congressman Vela, the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, for being a leader on this issue and for promoting aggressive action to protect the United States and our diplomatic corps overseas.

Drug cartel violence in Mexico threatens American and Mexican citizens and their families on both sides—on both sides of the border. It also negatively impacts our important bilateral trade relationship with Mexico. Combatting the violence and stabilizing this region needs to be a top priority for both countries.

Congressman Vela's position is that the consulates should remain open to support American citizens and economic interests on both sides of the border. And I agree with him, and I find his argument quite persuasive.

Closing U.S. consulates in Mexico will simply destabilize the region making our borders less safe. Consulates in Mexico play a critical role in implementing Laredo initiative, which is our Nation's \$2.5 billion investment in disrupting organized groups, institutionalizing the rule of law, and building stronger communities.

Many of our U.S. consulates also house our Federal law enforcement efforts to combat the drug trade and strengthen border security. In addition, many U.S. companies, including DuPont, Tyco, and General Electric, have significant business interests in Mexico. These other businesses provide 65,000 jobs in Matamoros, our consular district alone, and they depend on the support provided by U.S. consulates. U.S. consulates also provide crucial services to U.S. citizens residing in and visiting Mexico.

Our diplomatic relationship with Mexico is a critical tool for stabilizing the region. We need to strengthen this diplomatic relationship, especially in regions that need it most, not damage it by closing these consulates, as some have suggested. I believe Mexico should do more to enhance security in the region. But the U.S. also has a role to play, such as stemming the flow of guns.

Congressman Vela has suggested establishing secure economic zones in northern Mexico similar to those that have already been implemented in southern Mexico. These zones would include a joint economic plan that would provide more opportunities for communities on both sides of the border. These ideas deserve serious consideration.

We must ensure that Mexico is doing everything it can to root out the corruption that plagues law enforcement and civil institutions in order to effectively combat drug cartels. Greater stability will encourage more economic investment.

On our side of the border the United States must do more to stem the flow of guns into Mexico. In March, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms reported that more than 100,000—more than 100,000 guns were recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing from 2009 to 2014. Of those 100,000 guns, 70 percent of them originated in the United States. Guns that are entering Mexico are being trafficked in from the United States.

This is one reason I'm proud to cosponsor with my good friend, Congresswoman Maloney, the Gun Trafficking Prevention Act, which is being reintroduced today on a bipartisan basis by our colleague, Mrs. Maloney. If we can stem illegal gun trafficking in the United States, there's no doubt the positive effects will be seen by our neighbors to the south.

Finally, let me say this: The United States must take all appropriate steps to ensure that our diplomats are safe and fully and fairly compensated. I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, that that must happen. This includes building modern, secure, diplomatic facilities. Construction plans are underway in Mexico, Matamoros, and Nuevo Laredo to build new diplomatic facilities that will house Marine barracks to ensure even greater protection of our personnel.

I understand that the State Department is changing how it pays employees serving in dangerous and difficult environments. I appreciate the Department's efforts to use resources effectively and consistent with the law. But I believe no employees who serve on the front lines abroad should face reductions in pay.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how to further improve the safety of U.S. personnel while promoting our long-standing and mutually-beneficial relationship with Mexico.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank the gentleman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And I would like to associate myself with your comments about some of our colleagues, Mr. Vela, as well as Mr. Cuellar, who is here and joining us on the stand. My understanding is that Congressman Vela would also like to participate with us today.

Even those these two gentlemen are not on our committee, we have had a tradition of allowing and asking unanimous consent to allow people to sit in on these hearings. So I would ask unanimous consent that our colleagues, Congressman Filemon Vela and Congressman Henry Cuellar be allowed to fully participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

We appreciate the perspective from these two gentlemen. They live in great proximity to the issues of things that we're going to be talking about today, and they've been invaluable to me in providing a good, I think, balanced perspective. And appreciate their passion on this issue and their care for the loved ones that are there in that area. Appreciate their perspective. Glad they're joining us today.

We'll now recognize our first panel of witnesses, but I would like to tell members that I will hold the record open for 5 legislative days for any members who would like to submit a written statement.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. We're pleased to be joined by Mr. Gregory Starr, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of the Diplomatic Security at the United States Department of State.

Ambassador William Moser is the Principal Deputy Director of the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations at the United States Department of State. And he has a long storied history at the State Department. Appreciate your service and thank you for joining us here today.

Ms. Sue Saarnio—did I pronounce it properly? I hope so—is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the United States Department of State.

Mr. Robert Harris is the Director of the Joint Task Force-West at the United States Customs and Border Protection.

And Mr. Brandon Judd is the President of the National Border Patrol Council of the American Federation of Government Employees. We thank you all for being here.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses are to be sworn before they testify. So if you will please rise and raise your right hand.

Thank you. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Thank you. You may be seated.

Let the record reflect that all witnesses have answered in the affirmative.

In order to allow time for discussion, we would appreciate limiting your verbal testimony to 5 minutes. Your entire written statement will be made part of the record.

Mr. Starr, we will start with you and then we will simply go through and get to the question portion of the hearing.

Mr. Starr, you're now recognized for 5 minutes.

WITNESS STATEMENTS**STATEMENT OF GREGORY B. STARR**

Mr. STARR. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished committee members, good morning. And thank you for your invitation to appear today to discuss the security situation near U.S. consulates at the border in Mexico. We share your concerns regarding the security of the U.S. personnel in Mexico, and I look forward to discussing these issues with you today.

Our national interests often require us to serve in dangerous places around the world. However, it is clear that the U.S. Embassy and consulates in Mexico are exceptionally important platforms for diplomatic and consular engagement to advance our national interests.

I was in Mexico a few weeks ago and can bear witness to the hard work and dedication of the U.S. personnel serving on both sides of the border. I also saw the challenging circumstances in which many of our people operate. Environments such as Mexico involve constantly shifting threats that require comprehensive planning, agile decisionmaking, and deft diplomacy. Most of all, they require us to be present, fully engaged, and 100 percent committed to the security of our people and our facilities.

In Mexico, we engage with and seek support where necessary from a host government that recognizes Mexican and American vital interests are linked and that bilateral cooperation is required to counter the threats posed by transnational criminals. In every incident, threat, and attack in Mexico, this only underscores the continued importance of the strong bilateral relations and the comprehensive security cooperation.

Our embassy and consulates in Mexico play a critical role in providing services to American citizens, issuing visas, and implementing key foreign policy objectives. I work closely with my colleagues in the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations as the Department builds diplomatic missions in Mexico to increase safety and security. These new facilities are vital platforms for diplomacy, all of which will meet the rigorous Overseas Security Policy Board standards for safety and security.

During my recent visit to some of the border consulates, I walked with the principal officers and regional security officers to view the additional security measures taken and augmented host country security presence protecting our facilities. These protective features allow us to operate necessary programs that strengthen Mexico police capacity, reinforce critical law enforcement cooperation, and improve security along our southern border.

These consulates also aid the expansive bilateral trade that supports both countries totaling over \$500 billion annually. But it is simply not enough to improve physical security. We are also training the Foreign Service community on how to better respond in these environments.

All officers under chief of mission authority at our border post in Monterrey are required to take the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat training course, also known as FACT, which teaches them hard security skills. As a result, personnel in our missions are better prepared for operating in challenging environments, and we are work-

ing towards making FACT training universal for all Foreign Service personnel at our posts overseas regardless of the threat levels.

I recognize the hardships that our people and their families endure in such environments. It is a testament to their courage, their commitment, and the important work that they are accomplishing abroad. Having served over 30 years in the Foreign Service, I understand wholeheartedly the sacrifices our people make. It is simply woven into the fabric of what uniquely defines the Foreign Service community. Knowing the challenges ahead, they willingly and courageously step up to fill the important positions that we have in Mexico and throughout the world.

I look forward to working with Congress to ensure our personnel are serving abroad safely and that they continue to have safe platforms for advancing our national interests. And I want to thank Congress for the resources and support that you have provided over the years, and we look forward to your continuing support in years ahead.

Thank you. And I'll be glad to answer any questions that you have.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Starr follows:]

[For complete submitted testimony, please see the following website: <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/construction-costs-and-delays-at-the-u-s-embassy-in-kabul/>]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Ambassador Moser, you're now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR WILLIAM H. MOSER

Mr. MOSER. Good morning, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and members of the committee. And thank you very much for the invitation to appear before the committee today to discuss the U.S. consulates in northern Mexico.

Security is a top priority for the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations. Since the enactment of the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act, SECCA, of 1999, OBO has completed 122 more secure facilities and have an additional 39 in design or under construction. These facilities provide more than 35,000 people with a safer workplace.

Constructing secure diplomatic facilities in Mexico underscores our commitment to strengthening our bilateral relationship and reflects increased U.S.-Mexican commitments to issues such as migration, counter-narcotics, trade, and border security.

Over the last 7 years, OBO has constructed new Consulate General facilities in Mexico in Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and most recently in Monterrey. Together, these facilities provide safer work space for over 770 staff.

Our work continues in northern Mexico with the new U.S. Consulate General in Nuevo Laredo under construction and expected to be completed in 2017. This new consulate will provide workspace for approximately 150 staff. Another U.S. Consulate General in Matamoros is in design and expected to be awarded for construction this fall and completed in 2019. This new Consulate General is planned to accommodate approximately 197 staff.

We have an active and aggressive site search underway in Mexico to meet our commitments. We are under contract for new Consulate General sites in Nogales, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, and anticipate closing on these sites in 2015 and 2016. We are also in the process of evaluating sites in Merida to replace the existing facilities.

Additionally, a new U.S. Embassy in Mexico City is currently in design and includes office space for over 1,300 staff members, a U.S. Marine security guard residence, and a consular area with over 75 teller windows.

OBO works closely with Diplomatic Security every step of the way on all of our projects. OBO and Diplomatic Security physical, technical, and industrial security specialists are involved in project development from early site selection, planning, design, construction, and through occupancy. All U.S. diplomatic facilities built by OBO meet the Department's standards for security and life safety.

By 2020, we expect to have constructed or broken ground on over nine new diplomatic facilities in Mexico that will serve as secure platforms from which to conduct diplomacy and to fulfill foreign policy objectives for many years to come.

And I'm happy to answer your questions at any time.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Moser follows:]

[For complete submitted testimony, please see the following website: <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/construction-costs-and-delays-at-the-u-s-embassy-in-kabul>]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Ms. Saarnio, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF SUE SAARNIO

Ms. SAARNIO. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State responsible for our Mexico portfolio in the Western Hemisphere Bureau, I want to assure you, as my colleagues have, that the safety and security of our colleagues in Mexico are our top priority.

I started my diplomatic career in Mexico City, and I would be proud to serve in Mexico again. I'd like to share with you today the work that the State Department performs to assist American citizens in Mexico's border region. I will highlight the measures we're taking to enhance security in Mexico through strong, bilateral cooperation, while ensuring the safety of U.S. personnel, particularly of those serving in the U.S. consulates along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The State Department closely examines all threats to our diplomats, locally-employed colleagues, and U.S. facilities. The Department assesses daily the risks the U.S. personnel face as they do their jobs in a constantly-shifting landscape. We seek a balance between the critically-important work our people do, including the consular services provided to American citizens in Mexico, and the inherent risk of working in a challenging security environment.

At every step, we work to ensure the security and safety of all American citizens, but particularly our diplomatic colleagues in

Mexico. We remain vigilant and we analyze carefully new potential threats.

Our embassy and our consulate personnel meet frequently with Mexican Federal, state, and local counterparts to discuss these concerns and to assure that all appropriate measures are being taken to protect our personnel and U.S. citizens of business.

We have systems in place that allow us to communicate rapidly and effectively with U.S. citizens when the security situation changes. Our travel warning, country-specific information, and security messages provide U.S. citizens with our best assessment of the risks they may face when traveling to certain regions in Mexico.

The United States and Mexico share a mutual investment in security and prosperity. The State Department, along with key U.S. Government agencies, such as the Justice Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and others work with the Mexican Government through the Merida Initiative to combat transnational criminal organizations and to protect our citizens from the crime and violence these organizations generate.

Because of our robust and ongoing dialogue with Mexico on security issues, Mexican Federal authorities have taken action to improve security conditions and reduce violence, particularly in the state of Tamaulipas, where the United States Government is represented at the border consulates of Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros.

The bilateral economic relationship between our two countries is huge. Indeed, the two-way trade topped \$550 billion in 2014. Eighty percent of that trade crossed the U.S.-Mexico land border. Our integrated economic relationship supports thousands of jobs in both countries and hundreds of thousands of people legally cross our border each day. Mexico remains the top foreign destination for travelers from the United States. In fact, we estimate that on any given day there are 1.5 million American citizens in Mexico.

Our U.S. Consulate General in Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros in particular, support this vibrant relationship through visa services for tourists, students, and workers. They provide critical services to the some 138,000 U.S. citizens living in their consular districts, and to thousands of U.S. visitors and the commercial travelers.

These services include passport issuances and renewals, issuances of consular reports of birth abroad, providing information on voter registration, and offering notary services for documents to be used in the United States. The consulates also provide emergency services to American citizens who are arrested, kidnapped, or face temporary destitution in Mexico.

We share the committee's concern about the levels of violence in certain areas in Mexico, and we assess the overall environment on a daily basis. We believe that U.S. interests are best protected by maintaining a strong presence on the ground in Mexico and continuing our close law enforcement and security relationship. We review and monitor the situation daily and have been taking all appropriate steps to ensure the safety of American citizens, including government personnel.

I want to assure you, this is and will continue to be a top priority for me, my leadership, and the Department.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Ms. Saarnio follows:]

[For complete submitted testimony, please see the following website: <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/construction-costs-and-delays-at-the-u-s-embassy-in-kabul>]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Mr. Harris, you're now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT L. HARRIS

Mr. HARRIS. Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about the Department of Homeland Security's Southern Border and Approaches Campaign's Joint Task Force-West, which represents the next evolution of border security on our Nation's southern border.

I assumed the position of director of the newly-created pilot joint task force on December 15, 2014. Prior to this position, I was the first then-commander of Customs and Border Protection's South Texas campaign where I served from February 2012 to December 2014 in Laredo, Texas.

I've held numerous executive leadership positions in my more than 30-year Border Patrol career, to include serving as chief patrol agent of the Laredo, Texas, and Spokane, Washington, Border Patrol sectors; chief of intelligence operations and as the deputy chief of the U.S. Border Patrol where I led and managed the transition of the U.S. Border Patrol into the then newly-created U.S. Customs and Border Protection in 2003.

I want to take a moment to speak to you about the Southern Border and Approaches Campaign and the Joint Task Force-West. This campaign directs DHS resources in a collaborative fashion with pre-identified, component-validated, Secretary-approved targets, spanning a range of threats and challenges, including the terrorist threat, illegal immigration, drug, human, and arms trafficking, and the illicit financing of all of these operations.

I'm working hand in hand with my counterparts, Vice Admiral William Dean Lee from the U.S. Coast Guard, director of Joint Task Force-East; and Special Agent in Charge David Marwell, HSI special agent in charge director of joint task force investigations.

Although we are in our early stages, we are working to coordinate DHS forces and leverage Department of Defense international, State, local, and tribal resources to combat the transnational criminal organizations who exploit vulnerabilities in our southern border and approaches. This level of integration among DHS component agencies is unprecedented since the creation of the department in 2003.

The Joint Task Force-West will secure the southern border and its approaches through departmental unity of effort, thereby integrating and prioritizing DHS security operations. Our five primary objectives in Joint Task Force-West are, integrate and align our intelligence capabilities; institutionalize integrated counternetwork operations to identify and target transnational criminal organizations and their illicit networks; prioritize investigative efforts to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations and illicit networks; strengthen international prosecutorial

and deterrent efforts against transnational criminal organizations enterprises and significant activity impacting the Joint Task Force-West joint operating area; and finally, advance the Joint Task Force-West mission through unified communication and messaging efforts.

The structure of the Joint Task Force-West focuses cross-departmental and integrated counternetwork operations on strategic objectives across four geographic corridors: California, Arizona, New Mexico, West Texas, and South Texas. The Joint Task Force-West will focus on creating and implementing a standardized methodology for identifying and prioritizing strategic targets based on national security, public safety, and border security threats.

We have begun the threat prioritization process by developing a concept of operations plan and courses of action for each corridor. The goal will be to expedite integrated counternetwork operations against a list of prioritized transnational criminal organizations across the southwest border on October 1, 2015. This has never before been done in a coordinated and integrated means across the entire southwest border.

These corridor operations will expand our ability to impact illicit networks beyond the border from their point of origin to destination point through integrated DHS and interagency cooperation. These joint efforts will result in consequence application to identified targets through investigation, enforcement, and administrative actions. The joint task force framework also enables DHS to streamline our collaboration, innovation, and integration with other government entities.

For example, in the South Texas corridor, we have taken steps to move past collaboration and into the integration of intelligence, investigation, and interdiction resources, and have conducted counternetwork operations against prioritized threats. This new partnership further reduces institutional barriers and duplication of effort, provides for a unity of effort understanding the threat network, and enhances our ability to dismantle these networks.

I am confident that moving forward the Southern Border and Approaches Campaign will effectively disrupt, degrade, and dismantle threats in a strategic and coordinated manner like never before and improve our ability to combat criminal organizations who present a threat to our efforts to secure the southern border.

I look forward to answering any questions.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Harris follows:]

[For complete submitted testimony, please see the following website: <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/construction-costs-and-delays-at-the-u-s-embassy-in-kabul>]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Mr. Judd, you're now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRANDON JUDD

Mr. JUDD. Thank you, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings.

In June, a CBP helicopter was shot and forced down in Laredo, Texas. To many in Washington, this was a wakeup call to the in-

creasing violence on the Mexican border. Unfortunately, this was far from an isolated incident.

For example, in 2014, less than 100 miles from the helicopter shooting, Border Patrol Agent Javier Vega was murdered defending his family from two armed illegal immigrants while on a fishing trip. One of the murderers had been deported four times, the other twice for illegally crossing the border.

Twenty years ago, and about the time I joined the Border Patrol, the Zeta, Sinaloa, Gulf, and Knights Templar cartels did not exist or were not widely known. Although narcotics and illegal immigrant smuggling were conducted by organized crime, it was not nearly on the level we see the cartels operating today. There were even relatively small-time players conducting smuggling operations within a given area of operations.

Although violence could and did erupt, the older generation of smugglers took the long view. They would rather risk losing a load of narcotics to the Border Patrol than opening fire on agents. Violence brought unwanted attention on both sides of the border, and that was bad for business. This all began to unravel in the early 2000s with the emergence of the drug cartels.

These cartels are well organized, heavily armed, and pathologically violent. To give you a sense of the violence, the official death toll—as you quoted earlier—the official death toll from the cartel violence in Mexico is 60,000. This is more than the United States military lost in Vietnam. However, the unofficial death toll in Mexico is over 120,000 killed and another 27,000 missing and presumed dead.

In Mexico, the cartels kill without hesitation or fear of prosecution. In May of this year, cartel members shot down a Mexican Army helicopter in the state of Jalisco. Why would we expect them to behave any differently on the U.S.-Mexico border?

The second factor driving the increased violence is the rise of criminal aliens. When I first started in the Border Patrol, if you were a citizen of Mexico, we simply took down your information, took a single fingerprint, loaded you on a bus and drove you to the border for repatriation. It was a revolving-door border enforcement policy with cases where agents often arrested the same individual twice in the same shift.

Three positive developments, however, changed this. The first was the change in the way we collected information. Instead of just capturing one fingerprint, we began taking the prints of all ten fingers and running the prints of those arrested against all criminal databases kept in the United States Department of Justice. We were then able to identify with certainty criminal aliens attempting to reenter the United States or to identify those who were arrested during interior patrol activities.

The second positive step was the implementation of the various consequence delivery systems used in certain places along the border, and the third was Immigration and Customs Enforcement's criminal deportation program.

I want to be very clear on this, especially given the recent incendiary comments about who is crossing the border and the assertions that the border is far safer than it has ever been: In 2014 ICE deported 177,000 convicted criminals. Of this number, 91,000 were

arrested by the Border Patrol trying to illegally reenter this country.

To put this figure in perspective, in 2014 the Border Patrol apprehended and arrested just under 500,000 illegal immigrants. Meaning that one in every five arrests last year by the Border Patrol was a criminal alien. Almost 50 percent of the criminal aliens supported in 2014 were convicted of aggravated felonies. These charges include murder, rape, sexual assault of a child, and drug and weapons trafficking. These are not petty criminals, and approximately 60 percent of those deported last year had already been deported at least once before.

This is the challenge we are facing at the border today. There are those who will point to lower apprehension rates and tell you the border is secure. Border Patrol agents, however, throughout this nation will tell you the border is not secure and the southwest border certainly is not safe.

We know what the problems are. What can we do to improve? First thing, increase manpower. Currently, there are 21,370 Border Patrol agents in this country. And that's actually what Congress mandates that we have. We're actually about 2,000 less, under that. So we don't even have the floor that Congress has mandated that we maintain. We do not have to double the size of the Border Patrol to gain operational control of the border, but we are, in my opinion, approximately 5,000 agents short of where we should be.

Secondly, supervisory staffing levels. The Border Patrol is an extremely top-heavy organization with far too many layers of management. The average large police department has one supervisor for every ten officers. The Border Patrol has one supervisor for every four agents. The committee should mandate a ten-to-one ratio and achieve it through attrition in the supervisory ranks. This could easily return another 1,500 agents to the field.

Because of time, I'm just going to point out the other points. We need to continue with interior enforcement, we need to improve our training, and we need to prosecute assaults against Border Patrol agents. In this manner, I believe that we will decrease the violence on the border and we will help to maintain border security.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Judd follows:]

[For complete submitted testimony, please see the following website: <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/construction-costs-and-delays-at-the-u-s-embassy-in-kabul/>]

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank you all for your participation and your service to this country.

I'll now recognize myself for 5 minutes to our three State Department witnesses.

Four people on this committee, myself, Elijah Cummings, Ron DeSantis, and Steve Lynch sent a letter dated July 15, 2015. My question is, what percentage of the documents asked for in this letter has the Congress—has this committee, have they been given?

Ambassador Moser, do you know?

Mr. MOSER. I don't know the exact percentage.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Can you use your microphone, please.

Mr. MOSER. Excuse me. I'm sorry. I don't know the exact percentage sir. I do know that we have provided 150,000 pages of documents.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. It doesn't matter unless we get the right percentage.

So Ms. Saarnio——

Ms. SAARNIO. Saarnio.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. —what percentage?

Ms. SAARNIO. Sir, I'm not aware of that. That would be in Ambassador Moser's——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. It's directed to Secretary Kerry.

Mr. Starr, what percentage of the documents do we have?

Mr. STARR. I do not know, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Should we issue a subpoena, Mr. Starr?

Mr. STARR. I believe that most of the documents are OBO-produced documents. I know that they're working hard to——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Ambassador Moser, is that true? Where are these documents?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, we have a process for producing them. And I do want to assure you that I or members of my staff are more than happy to work with your staff in order to prioritize——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. We sent the letter on July 15, and you can't tell us that we got all the documents. So what do we need to do to get there? Do I need to issue a subpoena?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, we will work with you to try to produce the documents that you require.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. When will you have all those documents to us?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, I can't tell you how fast the process will work.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. That's for sure. I agree with you on that. I shouldn't have to waste any of my time asking for documents that we requested back in July knowing that we were working towards a hearing on this date.

Mr. Harris, of the border, the Secure Fence Act of 2006 defined operational control as, "the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband," The goal of this was to achieve 100 percent operational control.

Based on your knowledge, your experience, what percentage of the border today is secure?

Mr. HARRIS. Sir, I would have to defer to CBP to give a more detailed response to that question. In my current capacity, that's not within my area of focus.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Is there a metric that you all looked for on that, or no?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, I'm really involved in counternetwork operations, basically to work with the components across DHS——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Okay. So you don't have an answer to that question.

Mr. Judd, what percentage of the border is under operational control?

Mr. JUDD. According to the agents that I speak with that are actually on the frontline that actually work and see what we arrest

and what gets away, I would say that we would be lucky if we're 40 percent.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Mr. Starr, one of the frontline people that—some of the frontline people that we rely on, and for those Americans who are working at our consulates, and certainly at the embassy are the local guards, do you know what we're paying those local guards on a monthly basis?

Mr. STARR. Congressman, I couldn't quote you an exact dollar figure. We did go over this with the new contract that we're putting in place. I would tell you that it's a competitive salary in terms of any other local guards in the country, and, in fact, it probably is competitive with the police as well. But it is based on Mexican salaries.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And that's the concern, is that we're paying these local guards, at least what our staff has been told, roughly \$316 per month is their monthly salary. And I recognize it's Mexico. It's not New York City. Wages are going to be different. But does that number sound about right, \$316 per month for a local guard to guard our U.S. facilities?

Mr. STARR. Yes, sir, that's about the prevailing wage in Mexico.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The opportunity for corruption, I think you can see, is of great concern. I don't know what the magical number is, but Mr. Judd, I was going to ask you about the ratio of management and the agents that you need, but I think you've addressed that.

One of the great concerns I have is getting these new facilities to secure our American personnel. I'm going to put up a slide here. To give a little background in history, we were operating under standard embassy design. This is something Secretary Powell put into place. But under the Obama administration with Secretary Clinton they moved to this design excellence.

And here is the concern. If you go to the second slide, Tijuana was built under standard embassy design. Is there anything wrong—Ambassador Moser—with the Tijuana facility? Is it too ugly for Mexico?

Mr. MOSER. Not to any knowledge, sir. But in fact, it really wasn't a standard embassy design, sir. It was a derivative. It didn't really do the exact standard embassy design.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So we spent about \$668,000 per desk but it's as close to standard embassy design as we have. But then we have these modified design excellence. Monterrey was built, it jumped cost at \$900,000 per desk. But the two under construction, Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo, we're now looking at \$1.8 million per desk; in Nuevo Laredo at \$1.7 million per desk. We're talking \$191 million to build something in Matamoros in Nuevo Laredo at \$154 million. How do you explain that?

And by the way, in Matamoros—I'm sorry, Nuevo Laredo, \$154 million, you start doing that math, you know, it's like 88 desks. How do we afford to do that around the world? Why we have such a massive jump in expense? These expenses could go to personnel, guard forces. And you all want to take away danger pay. So why so much expense on these?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, I acknowledge your concerns, and it is my obligation as a career State Department employee to make sure that we're doing our best to serve our taxpayers' concerns.

I will tell you that over time our security standards and our building quality has increased in order to adapt to actually new circumstances. And it's very hard without a detailed analysis that looks at site, where building is located, what we're trying to accomplish in each building to compare on a desk-by-desk basis.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Well, what other metric would you use?

Mr. MOSER. As I've told you, it takes more of an accounting approach where you look at what the inputs are and then gauge it to what comes out.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, well, that's costing tens of millions of dollars more and it's taking a longer time. We will continue to have hearings about this. It is an outrageous amount of money and it's taking longer. No doubt that we need new facilities.

I do need to ask before I yield back about the danger pay. I'm not sure which one of the three to ask you about, but I guess, Ms. Saarnio, we'll start with you. To what Mr. Cummings said, are people working for the State Department in Mexico, is there any threat of their wages going down by the loss of danger pay?

Ms. SAARNIO. Congressman, thank you for that question. You know, I'm glad I get to answer this, because I'm very proud of our Foreign Service colleagues who have—

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, I know. We're all proud of them. Keep going. What's the answer to this question? Are you going to cut their pay?

Ms. SAARNIO. The answer is that our allowances change over time as situations change. And yes, we have developed a new system by where we're changing danger pay and hardship pay. In Mexico we're going—the changes will be some posts will go up and some posts will go down. But that reflects, we believe, the change in the situation on the ground.

The danger pay that's been calculated in the past, some of the elements of that, the criminal violence and living conditions, social isolation that you mentioned, those are also accounted for in hardship pay. And so if we look at the net pay for our colleagues, for example, our colleagues in Matamoros, will be getting a 5 percent increase. Our colleagues in Nuevo Laredo and Tijuana will be going down by 5 percent. So we think that reflects the accurate situation.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So Nuevo Laredo, there is no mayor that has authority over a police force there. We've documented the violence. Are you telling me it's more safe now in Nuevo Laredo than it has been?

Ms. SAARNIO. By our calculations, it is.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. The American Foreign Service Association takes great issue with this. You disagree with them, their analysis in that?

Ms. SAARNIO. I'm a former board member of the American Foreign Services Association.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah. They disagree with this position.

Ms. SAARNIO. Well, I'm not so sure about the specific cases.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Well, I'll read you the quote "On the basis of conditions of environments which differ substantially from condi-

tions of environments in the continental United States, it's a recruitment and retention incentive." My understanding is they disagree with this.

You're telling me that in northern Mexico, it's less secure in Matamoros now and more secure in Nuevo Laredo.

Ms. SAARNIO. So we believe the situation on the ground has changed and our allowance is perceived—

Chairman CHAFFETZ. In Nuevo Laredo, if you work at the consulate, do you know how far you can travel away from the consulate as an American?

Ms. SAARNIO. I do. I'm aware of the situation.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Okay. How far can you travel?

Ms. SAARNIO. You don't. You stay close by your home, and your social life is very restricted. That's true and that's taken into account—

Chairman CHAFFETZ. You have about nine square miles that you can operate, that you are allowed to go. And you're going to decrease their pay?

Ms. SAARNIO. Sir, when Foreign Service officers sign up to go to these posts, they recognize the situations may change and the allowances may change in the time that they're serving there. It's part of the process, and we recognize it when we go to these posts.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I'm just telling you, you've got a lot of people on this panel that don't understand, given the massive amount of violence, the statistics that we just went through, particularly with Mr. Judd, the violence that's going on there; and you're going to decrease these people's pay. I went down there. It was the number one issue.

My time is well expired. This is not an acceptable conclusion to your so-called analysis. I do not agree that it is more safe than it has been, and it's an exceptionally difficult place to live.

I now recognize the gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to pick up exactly where the chairman left off. Mrs. Saarnio, how often are these reassessments made with regard to pay allowances? I see Mr. Starr is jumping up and down. You can answer. You may.

Mr. STARR. Ranking Member Cummings, if I could answer the question.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Please do.

Mr. STARR. At least once a year we review the allowances at all of our posts. The danger pay that the chairman is referring to, in August of 2014, we began a review of how we issued danger pay. We looked at also our hardship allowances.

Mr. CUMMINGS. When was that?

Mr. STARR. In August of 2014.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Okay.

Mr. STARR. It's been a continuing review. Our goal is to make sure that we have equitable implementation of our allowances across our entire world program. The global program includes posts that in many cases are much more dangerous than Matamoros or Nuevo Laredo.

Yes, I absolutely admit there are high levels of violence in both of those places. But in our analysis, it is very different, that the violence there is not directed against the consulate or consulate

personnel. They can be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We have many places in the world where we serve where the violence is directed against our people, and those are the places where our employees are getting danger pay.

For the types of criminal violence that we see in Mexico, that is reflected in their hardship differential, and many of them have gotten increases in their hardship differential to reflect the criminal violence.

Mr. CUMMINGS. What do you define hardship as?

Mr. STARR. Hardship, it looks at many different factors. It can look at isolation. It can look at pollution. It can look at the medical condition.

Mr. CUMMINGS. The nine-square-mile limitation would be a hardship?

Mr. STARR. Exactly. Exactly, sir. But I would also tell you that these posts in Mexico, our employees can get in a car and in 10 or 15 minutes be in the United States and across the border and shopping and going to school.

We have people in places like Chad. We have places, Mali, and different places where no such types of outlet exist, and in those places they're going to get a higher level of danger pay if it exists, and they're going to get higher hardship differentials. We're very careful in how we look at this. We want to make sure that our people are getting the right allowances for the conditions on the ground.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Did you have something, Mr. Moser? Ambassador; I'm sorry.

Mr. MOSER. No.

Mr. CUMMINGS. I think you'll find, Mr. Starr, that this is a bipartisan effort to try to make sure our people are treated fairly and that they are paid adequately, but when I thought about what Ms. Saarnio said, she said a lot of times when these people go into these positions, they know what they're going into.

I mean, I know that sounds simple, but when you're a person who really wants to serve your government, yeah, that may very well be part of the basis of which, that you know what you're going into. I assume that a lot of these people will take these positions because it's a part of their job. Am I right, Madam?

Ms. SAARNIO. Yes. I think many of the Foreign Service officers are willing and go to these posts knowing the dangers, but they also know that these allowances change over time when you're at post; and if the situation changes, they could be changed while they are serving there or after they leave.

Mr. CUMMINGS. So Mr. Starr said, you look at them about on a yearly basis. If something radical happened and there was a major problem, would there be any kind of exception to that general rule of one year? Do you follow me?

Mr. STARR. Congressman, not typically. I would tell you that when we have a radical change in a situation, we look at the measures that we take. We may implement additional security. We may withdraw personnel. We may take family members out of a post.

Typically the allowances are looked at once a year. On an exceptional basis, if something really drastic does happen, we can look at it; but generally allowances are looked at once a year.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Starr, in your testimony, going to another subject, you referenced a recent visit to some of the border consulates in Mexico. Is that right?

Mr. STARR. Yes, sir, I went early last month.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Now would you describe for us the situation that our American personnel on the ground are experiencing?

Mr. STARR. I spent a great deal of time talking with our employees, both our local employed staff and our Americans. They are aware. They know the levels of violence that are going on around them. We are not having trouble staffing those posts.

I also met with OSAC constituents, Americans that are working with American companies that are there, and talked with them as well. And I think it's very clear in our OSAC travel warnings that are out to the American businesses, American businessmen, and the consular warnings, we're not pulling any punches on the level of danger down in Mexico.

Mr. CUMMINGS. As a matter of fact, in the Matamoros consular district, there was a spike in crime in February. Is that right?

Mr. STARR. Exactly, sir. We looked at that almost daily as we can began to see that two cartel or actually sub groups within a cartel were beginning to fight it out among each other and higher levels of violence. We were plotting every single day where the violence was taking place.

We were looking at the location of our residences, the location of where we went shopping, the location of our facilities, against where the violence was. We were ready to pull the pin and move people out if that violence came into our neighborhoods but we look at those things almost daily when that level goes up.

Mr. CUMMINGS. So back then in February, there were six times as many incidents as compared to the month before. Is that right?

Mr. STARR. That's approximately right, sir, yes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Now, did any of these security incidents involve U.S. citizens?

Mr. STARR. Yes, there were some U.S. citizens, not from the consulate that were involved, but yes, there were U.S. citizens that were affected.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And so you talked about how you were monitoring the problems, but what else has the State Department done or is doing to address that type of increase?

Mr. STARR. I think that's where the value of the consulates is most apparent and the embassy as well. As we monitored the violence going up, we could play a role both through our consular offices and warning Americans and Americans that were working there.

Through OSAC we put out warnings. Our consul general was dealing with the governor of the region and talking with the police. The regional security officer was talking with the police, and the ambassador and the others in the embassy in Mexico City were pointing out that the levels of violence were going up and that the government needed to address this quickly and effectively. And there soon after that—and I don't want to say that this is entirely just at our urging. Clearly the government of Mexico understood this as well—they put additional forces on the ground to try to stem the violence.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Now, Mr. Harris, in June of this year, shots were fired at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection helicopter near Laredo, Texas. The shots appear to have come from the Mexican side of the border. Fortunately no one was injured in this incident, but it does raise concerns about the safety of our Federal law enforcement officers that are protecting the border. I understand that in response to Customs and Border Patrol, they sent two armored Blackhawk helicopters equipped to handle small arms fire to be used in the region. Is that correct?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, sir, that's correct.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And what else has been done to ensure the safety of the agents on the ground?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, first of all, before I answer the question, I'd like to say that the job of a Border Patrol agent is very dangerous work. We have had 122 Border Patrol agents killed in the line of duty since the Border Patrol was created in 1924. And DHS and CBP was created in 2003, and since that time we have had 33 officers killed in the line of duty, and 29 of those were Border Patrol agents.

So there's no question that being a U.S. Border Patrol agent is dangerous work. I think because we deal with a large population of economic migrants, but mixed in with those individuals are obviously some criminals. So it's important that our agents stay on their toes on a routine basis.

We try and take a look at what we call hot spots, which are zones that are known for a high-level of criminal activity and make sure that we have sufficient agent resources and equipment and the training and tactics in those areas to deal with those types of situations.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Just two last questions. Mr. Harris, can you think of anything else Congress can do to help protect these brave men and women on our borders?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, first of all, we appreciate all the support that you all have also given us. I would also like to point out on the helicopter shooting incident that Congressman Chaffetz responded to that situation, as he had referenced.

You know, it's just more stay engaged with the border. I think there's a lot of misinformation coupled with border security efforts. So we welcome any visits by Members of Congress to my new office so that you can see and hear what's going on on the border firsthand.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And, Mr. Starr, can you think of anything else we can do to help out on that end? And by the way, while you're formulating your answer, I just want you to know, Mr. Harris, on behalf of all of us, we understand how dangerous the job is, and we appreciate everything that you all do to address the issues that you have because they are very difficult, and we're sorry for the many losses and injuries that you just spoke about.

Mr. Starr?

Mr. STARR. Congressman, I believe that what we need to accept is that the battle to increase security rule of law and justice in Mexico is going to be a long-term battle. I think that we can see what has happened in Colombia and the types of improvements

that have been made there, and I think those are the types of improvements that we're going to have to help Mexico make.

I think DAS Saarnio could probably talk more effectively about this in terms of the programs that we have in place. But I think continuing those types of programs that we started in Colombia and we're currently running in Mexico to improve the judicial system, the training of the police, all those types of things are what's ultimately going to make this a safer location, safer country.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Before the gentleman yields back, I'll point out that there is no police force in Nuevo Laredo. There is none. So you can work on training them, but there isn't even one. It's run by the drug cartels, and shame on the State Department for cutting the people's pay there from the State Department.

That's not the way you're going to build morale and do more things. You're given tens of billions of dollars, and you're going to cut those poor people's pay. You can talk about training the local police force, but there isn't even a local police force to train.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Chairman, reclaiming by zero time. Mr. Starr, would you please answer what Chairman Chaffetz just said. I think he makes a good point.

Mr. STARR. Chairman Chaffetz is correct, to my knowledge, that the local police force is actually not functioning there, but there are levels of police forces as well. There are police from the governors—from that governate, it's like a state type of police, and there are Federal police is also there and soldiers.

So I think while Chairman Chaffetz is correct that we have great concerns about the fact that the mayor was murdered, that the local police have tremendous difficulties, we also work with the Federal and state authorities to ensure that other types of security services and police are as effective as they can.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I would ask unanimous consent to enter into the record, this is the United States Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Mexico 2015 Crime and Safety Report Nuevo Laredo into the record. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Mica.

Mr. MICA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding the hearing.

First of all, before we get to Mr. Judd, has the situation gotten worse? Is the violence just as bad in Mexico as it's been? Mr. Starr, what do you say?

Mr. STARR. The violence in Mexico ebbs and flows, sir.

Mr. MICA. But right now.

Mr. STARR. In certain places it's better than it was a year or 2 or 3 years ago. In certain places it's certainly worse.

Mr. MICA. Okay. Ambassador Moser.

Mr. MOSER. I'm not an expert on Mexico but, Congressman Mica—

Mr. MICA. Overall it's not getting much better. Is that right?

Mr. MOSER. I think there's ebbs and flows. There are parts of Mexico like Ciudad Juarez that are safer now than they were before.

Mr. MICA. But overall it's still a pretty violent country?

Mr. STARR. Yes.

Mr. MOSER. Yes.

Mr. MICA. Ms. Saarnio, same thing? Same assessment?

Ms. SAARNIO. Actually, sir, I would say that we are cautiously optimistic that we think the situation is somewhat better in certain parts of the country, and that's reflected in our danger pay changes. We've seen parts of the country that were in insurgency status a few years ago that are actually quite operating a lot better now. And a lot of that—

Mr. MICA. And there are places that are worse?

Ms. SAARNIO. That's true there are places that are worse—

Mr. MICA. Thank you.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Harris?

Mr. HARRIS. Similar response. I would say that depends on the area. I travel to Mexico on a personal basis and professional level. Some areas you travel with security and others you don't; but overall dangerous place, no question.

Mr. MICA. A dangerous place. Well, I read all the testimony. Mr. Judd, I think every Member of Congress should read yours. I think it's an incredible assessment.

Also, a little bit historic; I chaired Criminal Justice and Drug Policy from 1998 to 2000 and was in Mexico, and we had information at that time from the President's office to the cops on the street; corruption was prevalent. Unfortunately that's pretty much the same situation that we have today, but your report details it very well.

Startling is the number of 2014, you outlined the number of convicted criminals, and you cite the increasing number of criminal aliens coming across. Now we're better able to detect them, but the numbers are astounding. It says to put the figure in perspective, in 2014 the Border Patrol apprehended and arrested just under 500,000 illegal immigrants. Meaning one in every five arrests last year was a criminal alien. Is that correct?

Mr. JUDD. From the research that we have done—

Mr. MICA. So to get arrested, they had to be in and caught. Right?

Mr. JUDD. That is correct; yes, sir.

Mr. MICA. That's absolutely astounding. Simple math, that's probably 100,000 criminal aliens entering the United States. Basically it's out of control. And then you said that there—what can the Oversight Committee do to improve it. You said there has to be consequences. Right?

Mr. JUDD. Absolutely.

Mr. MICA. And there aren't consequences. I was stunned to find out the fact that Mexico is one of the most important illegal immigrant and narcotics transit points in the country. How many agents do we have in Phoenix?

Mr. JUDD. We have none.

Mr. MICA. None. You know, the other thing too is, there has to be consequences. How many consulates do we have? I counted about nine in Mexico. Is that right? I think we should close every one of those consulates immediately. Put the property up for sale. I think you have to have some consequences for actions. The place is out of control.

I just read—well, you cited the helicopter shooting at a U.S. Helicopter; right, and Chairman Chaffetz had helped on that, Mr. Harris. And in your report, I think, Mr. Judd, you said they actually shot down a Mexican helicopter the month before. Is that correct?

Mr. JUDD. Yes, they did.

Mr. MICA. And most startling, we heard the chairman, one of the missionaries down there shot yesterday, the 43 kids that were turned over by local authorities and shot or killed and then their bodies burned or destroyed, and this week or so I guess ago they just produced sort of a whitewash report on what took place.

And one of the leaders, of Mr. Jimenez Blanco was found dead about 2 weeks ago. He was interviewed by CNN just a couple of weeks ago and said that last week, Jimenez told CNN—Mexico that more than 100 bodies had been found hidden in graves in the area since October, decrying a worsening security situation.

So it doesn't sound like it's getting much better. They're even killing the people who are trying to do something about the injustice and slaughter that's going on in Mexico. Is that correct, Mr. Judd?

Mr. JUDD. Yes, it is. And what I find the scariest part of all of this border violence is how it's extending now into the interior of the United States. We just had a young man shot in the back by presumed an illegal alien from the country of El Salvador associated with the Mara Salvatrucha gang. We just had a U.S. citizen in San Francisco who was just killed. So we're not only seeing violence on the border, but this is extending into the United States, and that's scary.

Mr. MICA. And finally, Mr. Chairman, just I read this week, I think most of the illegal marijuana is still coming in from Mexico. But, congratulations, we just passed this past week, I saw the report that our young people, our students, more of them are now hooked on marijuana than on cigarettes. Congratulations.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I now recognize the gentlewoman from New York, Mrs. Maloney, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and all of the panelists and Ranking Member, for calling this truly important hearing.

And Mr. Judd hit it right on the head with his comment that it's not only on the border now. It is coming into the United States. Just this past week a news reporter and her cameraman were shot. A police officer putting gas in his car was shot. A woman from Illinois was shot. The incidents that you mentioned, and as Mr. Starr said, it's going to be a long effort on the border. And as my colleague, Mr. Mica, mentioned, it is out of control.

And I would like to point out that a lot of the shooting is coming from guns that were manufactured and slipped over the border into Mexico. In fact, Mexico has some of the most restrictive gun laws in the entire world, yet it's seen a tremendous surge in gun-related violence.

Just yesterday Chairman Cummings shared with me this letter that was sent to him from Charge de Affairs of Mexico, Alejandro Estivill, and in it he says that the ATF found that over 70 percent of the guns recovered in Mexico in 2014 were sourced from the United States. Now, that is a shocking statistic.

Seventy percent of the guns came from America. And in it he further writes, "Congress can play a very important role in combatting these transborder criminal organizations and the flow of illegal firearms by enacting proper legislation," I ask unanimous permission to put this letter into the record, Mr. Cummings, and Mr. Chaffetz.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Without objection, so ordered.

Mrs. MALONEY. And we are trying to do just that. Earlier today in a bipartisan way, Ranking Member Cummings and others, Member Kelly from Illinois, introduced legislation to make it a felony to deal with illegal guns, to be a trafficker. It's not even a felony in our country to traffic in illegal guns. I would say how dumb can you be? We should pass a bill making it a felony tomorrow, today.

And also the penalties, as we have heard in hearings before this committee, on the fast and furious hearings we had from law enforcement, they don't even bother to arrest traffickers or straw purchasers, those who purchase guns for others that are known criminals or drug dealers or gang leaders because there's no penalty. It's like a paper penalty, so they don't waste their time doing it. And they literally pled with us to give them the tools to do the job.

So today we are introducing this bill in a bipartisan way that would increase penalties for straw purchasers and make trafficking in illegal guns a felony.

Now, in Mexico, just to give an example, to make a purchase in a gun store, and they only have one gun store in the whole country, but to make a purchase they are required by law, and their store is operated by the Army, they must pass a background check, present identification, pass through a metal detector, hand over cell phones, a camera, just to enter the building. And once inside, a prospective buyer is fingerprinted, photographed, and then permitted to buy a single weapon and a box of ammunition; and they're required to take that home and put it under lock and key. So they have strong gun laws, but the obvious question is where are all these guns coming from? And these guns are coming from the United States.

And, Mr. Harris, in your testimony you said, "the U.S. Mexican border, the primary threats are southbound gun smuggling, northern bound drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal immigration, and the violence associated with these activities." Could you elaborate, please, Mr. Harris, on the southbound gun smuggling. How big is it? Can you tell us more about this gun smuggling?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, ma'am. I'll answer that question in kind of two parts. One is what my role is in southbound weapons smuggling at a strategic level. As I had also mentioned in my testimony, for the first time ever we have identified across the border the top transnational criminal organizations who are involved in the full gamut of smuggling activities which are listed. I would ask to add southbound bulk cash smuggling to that list as well.

But this to me is a huge accomplishment, never before seen in my career. All investigative agencies, whether FBI, DEA, ICE, they all have their cases that they work; but for the first time ever we have interagency agreement on which top criminal organizations we believe represent the highest threat to U.S. national security. Some of those organizations are involved in southbound weapons

smuggling. Our success on targeting these organizations before this has pretty much been on the domestic side, but this new position gives me the capability to target these organizations all the way from the origination point to the final destination point. That's one part of the——

Mrs. MALONEY. How many guns do you think are being trafficked into Mexico each year? Do you have any feel for it?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, the second part of my answer will respond to that. I'm not an expert at port of entry operations. I'll have to defer to my CBP counterpart. However, from my former capacity as a Border Patrol chief in Laredo, we routinely augment southbound inspections by OFO officers with detailed Border Patrol agents. I would say by and large our success in targeting southbound weapons smuggling is due to the vigilance and capabilities of our agents.

As I'm sure you know, we do not have the same kind of technology going southbound that we have going northbound. Nor do we do 100 percent southbound inspections. We do halts and surge operations and operations based on intelligence and investigative information, but largely the southbound weapons seizures are cold hits. It would be helpful to have some similar technology going southbound to what we have going northbound, a nonintrusive inspection technology, some of the backscatters would be very instrumental, and I think that would give us a better picture of what kind of weapons are going southbound.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman.

Mrs. MALONEY. My time is expired, but if I could say, Mr. Chairman, in one second, obviously part of controlling the crime in America and at the border is controlling the sale of illegal gun trafficking and straw purchases of illegal guns. Thank you.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. I now recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Farenthold, for 5 minutes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I get started, Ms. Maloney points out in her call for more gun laws here in the United States, that Mexico has some of the strictest gun laws and yet has the high violence. I think that just goes to make the point that restrictive gun laws actually take guns out of the hands out of law-abiding citizens and put them into the hands of criminals.

Mrs. MALONEY. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I don't have much time. If I do at the end, I will. I have some points I'd like to make because I used to represent the border at Brownsville and joined Mr. Chaffetz in June in his visit to Laredo after the helicopter was shot at, had the opportunity to visit with some of the Border Patrol agents down there.

Real quickly, while I get started, Mr. Harris, have we caught the people who shot at the helicopter, or has the Mexican Government caught them.

Mr. HARRIS. Well, the FBI is responsible for investigating all assaults on Federal agents. They're responsible for that investigation. It's my understanding that an individual was taken into custody. He was transported to Tampico, where he went before a judge, but he's now missing.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. That's reassuring. One of the things that I learned down there in visiting with some of the Border Patrol agents and actually spending some time on the border with some of the agents, was a level of frustration with some of the policies that this government has that makes it difficult to do their job. I hear it referred to as catch and release, or a policy that if there are only a certain number of illegal aliens in a vehicle, the coyote, or human smuggler, is not prosecuted and is let go, a frustration with seeing the same folks again and again.

They're caught; they're shooed across the border, counted as a deportation, and are back in the United States in a matter of hours. In fact, I visited with some of the Sheriffs in the district I represent, Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor in Victoria, or Frank Osborne, Matagorda County, and Jess Howell of Wharton; and they're all very upset and concerned about the Priority Enforcement Program, in which case very often the Federal Government refuses to take illegal aliens that they apprehend for deportation.

Mr. Judd, I'll start with you. Can you talk a little bit about, was my characterization of the frustration of the rank and file agents accurate?

Mr. JUDD. I think it was too soft. I think that you could have expressed a much greater level of frustration.

I want to point out that on the northern border, there was an arrest made of an illegal alien in the Havre Border Patrol sector. We took this individual into custody. We immediately released the individual on the street. Within weeks that individual went up to I believe it was Great Falls, Montana, and raped a 14-year old girl. We had this individual in our custody. We had the authority to remove this individual from this country, and we didn't do it. And then that individual went and raped a 14-year old girl. Her life will never be the same.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. And we see this again and again with the tragic murder of Kate Steinle, the shooting of the Border Patrol agents in the Rio Grande Valley by a pair of men who had been between them deported I think seven times. And there was a story in the news, I think it was just in the past couple of days, where a convicted burglar from Mexico with a history of repeated felony convictions and deportation was caught last week. It was the fifth time he crossed the border and had actually spent the bulk of the past 30 years in various jails. It just seems absolutely critical that we get the border secured. No point working on immigration before we get that done.

Mr. Harris, can you talk a little bit about the Priority Enforcement Program, the PEP, and have you heard from the sheriffs as well about their concern? They catch somebody, an illegal alien, and basically have nothing to do with them but turn them loose. We just defunded sanctuary cities in this country, but with PEP and the Border Patrol not taking aliens sheriffs caught, we have basically created a sanctuary country, haven't we?

Mr. HARRIS. I'll answer that question again in two parts. One is, as was noted in my testimony, I've been in the Border Patrol for 31 years. I've been in the Border Patrol when we made up to 1.6 million apprehensions a year with about 3,000 agents on duty. Most of those individuals were from the country of Mexico, very

easy to deal with those individuals. It was a revolving door type of a situation, as Mr. Judd had indicated earlier. But the border dynamics have changed over my career from what it was.

About 42 percent of everyone we apprehend is from a noncontiguous territory, most of those being from Central America, and a lot of them being women and children. So it's a different kind of a dynamic on how we deal with those individuals. And about 33 percent of everybody the Border Patrol arrests has to go before some kind of an immigration judge or an immigration proceeding. So the Border Patrol does not own all of the process, nor am I seeking that ownership, but it does not own all of the process that would allow for immediate repatriation of those individuals.

The second part of my response again is what my job is is really to target the criminal network from beginning to end. That does not necessarily mean that we are targeting criminal aliens throughout the United States as part of my job, but I'll just give you one example. I think ICE fugitive operations does a great job of picking up criminal aliens. And when I stepped into this job, they had just done a press event where they had arrested about 2,000 criminal aliens throughout the country. No question—

Mr. FARENTHOLD. But your job and your men's job would be easier if there were consequences to entering this country illegally and folks were deported and they faced consequences for multiple offenses? Mr. Judd, Mr. Harris, just a yes or no; would that be a better situation, because I'm out of time?

Mr. JUDD. Yes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Are you with us on that one, Mr. Harris.

Mr. HARRIS. Excuse me, sir?

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Do you think it would be better if we had some consequences and repatriated folks?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, I think every law enforcement officer regardless of what the profession is, when they've taken action they want to see some sort of a consequence delivered, but a little bit more challenging with the population we're dealing with.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you, and my time is expired. And I apologize to the gentlelady from New York in not being able to yield to her.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman. I now recognize the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This discussion about undocumented criminals, violence of course on the border, raises the question for me of the role that consulates play with respect to security, particularly in northern Mexico.

Now, as I understand it, Mr. Starr, the security agencies, the law enforcement agencies, are coordinated or facilitated through the consulate. I have in mind Customs and Border Protection, Drug Enforcement Agency, Immigration, of course, and Customs Enforcement, Marshal Service, is the consulate the place where these agencies would be stationed?

Mr. STARR. Ma'am, I can't say that every single one of those agencies is at every single one of the consulates, but you are correct that the consulates do serve as a base for consular operations

and for those types of operations, along with the Embassy in Mexico.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Starr, what I'm trying to get at is, you know, the average American if you say what's a consulate for would think about visas and tourism and the rest. We're talking about violence, undocumented criminals, and the rest; and I'm trying to get at what we're doing on the ground in Mexico through our consulates and the role they play.

Now, the United States I think, Mr. Starr, has wisely tried to involve itself in reform of the criminal justice system in Mexico itself in order to truly get at drug trafficking, gun trafficking, organized crime, which of course is always at the top of our agenda. And I'd like to ask you in that regard about the so-called Merida Initiative, which as I understand it, is charged with disrupting criminal organizations, strengthening judicial institutions in Mexico, improving stability in the surrounding communities.

Ms. Saarnio, or Mr. Starr, does that sound like what the Merida Initiative is about?

Ms. SAARNIO. Yes. Thank you, Representative, for bringing that up. I really appreciate you mentioning that because what we're talking about is the Merida Initiative. It's our security initiative with Mexico. We have been working with Mexico extensively since 2008. We have invested about \$1.4 billion right now in trying to improve the security situation in Mexico by working with the Mexican Government at the Federal, state and local levels, and we actually have seen areas where we have made progress, and we think a lot of that progress is because of our presence on the ground.

If we're working in Ciudad Juarez or in Tijuana or in Monterrey, our law enforcement officials, our military officials, can work with Mexican counterparts to give them advice, to lend assistance when they need it, to provide training if possible; and it's because of the funding provided by Congress, which we're very grateful for, where we have been able to actually make some in-roads and help Mexico establish the rule of law and the system that they are seeking.

Ms. NORTON. What impact would closing the consulates have on an initiative like the Merida Initiative?

Ms. SAARNIO. I think it would be very tragic not to have our colleagues down there in Mexico. They work very well every day on a daily basis with our counterparts all over the country.

Ms. NORTON. Is the Consulate where they're based?

Ms. SAARNIO. They're based at the embassy primarily, but they're also based at several of our consulates, yes. So in some of the cases where we have had the most success, it's where our officials were working locally with the officials locally; so, yes, it would have an impact, and I think it would be detrimental to not have it.

Ms. NORTON. What impact has it had so far on security in the region?

Ms. SAARNIO. Well, we believe the strong presence of our consulates actually helps establish the security. Not only are we providing for the security of American officials, American citizens who are there, but we also can work with local authorities and, as I said, to help them rebuild their institutions and help the Mexican Government achieve what it's seeking to do.

Our colleagues are really working all over the country all the time with the Mexican Government; and we're trying to help them achieve their goals.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. I now recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Carter, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Starr, earlier in your opening remarks, you said environments such as that in Mexico involve constantly shifting threats, require comprehensive planning, agile decisionmaking, in depth diplomacy. You went on to say, but it's simply not enough to improve physical security. We're also training the Foreign Service community on how to better respond in these environments.

Since 2008 the State Department has had a plan to build a Diplomatic Security training center, and included in that has been the curriculum, the infrastructure, and the personnel. But the OMB and the GAO have come out with reports on this. And during those studies, those studies that the OMB and the GAO have come out with, the OMB report has not been released. I have seen the OMB report, and my staff has seen the GAO report. Both of those reports cite the lack of cooperation by the State Department in trying to come up with proposals for this facility to be built.

Can you tell me on a facility that's this important, on a facility that's this expensive, why the State Department would be uncooperative in addressing this? Can you tell me why FLETC, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, in Glynco, Georgia, was only given 60 days to respond to this? Don't you think that they deserve more than 60 days? Don't you think the taxpayers of this country deserve to know exactly apples and apples what's going to be the best facility? What are we going to get the most from our taxpayers' dollars there? Would you agree with that?

Mr. STARR. Yes, sir, I would. I believe that it's clear that spending money on something that doesn't meet our requirements is not going to be a good investment. In previous hearings and in previous discussions with FLETC, they could not take our entire program and don't have the facilities that we need for the types of weapons that we use at the FLETC facility.

They proposed using the Townsend Bombing Range, which is about 60 miles north of FLETC. That is a Marine Corps bombing range that is at the moment under consideration from going from a nonlive munition bombing range to a live munition bombing range—

Mr. CARTER. I understand that, Mr. Starr. If I could.

Mr. STARR. We believe that the Fort Pickett site is the best—

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Starr, let me ask you, Mr. Starr; did you make this clear FLETC? Do you think that they had all the information? Because when you talk about the curriculum requirements for the training center, both in the OMB report and the GAO report, "It says the course information is only in the minds of the instructors, and providing it would cause a significant delay in Diplomatic Security operation."

How can we get a price on the curriculum, how can we get an idea, when it's only in the minds of the instructors?

Mr. STARR. I'm sorry, sir, that's not correct. We have extensive records——

Mr. CARTER. This come right out of the report.

Mr. STARR. We have extensive records. We have provided the curriculum. This is not just in the mind of the instructors, sir——

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Starr, I have seen the report.

Mr. STARR. Which report, sir?

Mr. CARTER. The OMB report, which you have denied to be released. I found nothing in there sensitive whatsoever.

There were six comparisons done. FLETC came out on top with three of those comparisons. Two of them were even, and one of them favored Fort Pickett. Can you tell me why that report's not being released?

Mr. STARR. Sir, the OMB report is a preliminary study.

Mr. CARTER. Why is it not being released?

Mr. STARR. I don't know, sir. That's an OMB report. I can tell you that the GAO report does not reflect that. GAO report has been finished. It has not been released yet either. I think it is probably wise to wait until that report is released.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Starr, you would agree this is important. Protecting the lives of our Foreign Service members are very important. Protecting their lives, and training is very important. We all agree with that.

This is easy. This is easy when we sit here and when we sat here a couple months ago and talked about Afghanistan, and said, hey, we spent too much money. We should have, could have, would have, but what's not easy is to do something about it and to learn from it and to have an apples-to-apples comparison. You need to go back; you need to compare the two sites, compare them fairly. If you're right, then I will be the first one in line to support you in that, but I'm telling you, you have not done that yet.

The State Department has made up their mind, they're not going to change their mind. It can only be built near Washington, D.C. Because after all, everything comes from Washington, D.C. That's the only way it can ever work. Mr. Starr, this is not right. You need to go back. You need to make it apples-to-apples comparisons. If we sit here and we say we shouldn't have spent this much money, but we don't learn from it, and we don't do something about the future, then we're all at fault here.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the remainder of my time.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman. I now recognize the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Cartwright, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank all the witnesses for coming today. This is an enormously important discussion we are having.

We heard from you, Mr. Harris, and particularly from you, Mr. Judd, some really vivid testimony about the level of violence that we're seeing connected with the border and the level of criminal that we're seeing at the border; but really Chairman Chaffetz called this hearing in large measure to talk about whether we ought to close those three consulates that he discussed.

And actually my colleague, Mr. Mica, is calling for the closure of all nine consulates in Mexico. What I didn't get from you, Mr. Harris, or you, Mr. Judd, was the nexus between that discussion and

the discussion of the level of violence that you've been talking about. How does it cut, starting with you, Mr. Harris, how would closing these three consulates that Chairman Chaffetz is talking about, how would that cut on the violent situation there?

Mr. HARRIS. Sir, first of all, let me just say I'm not familiar with the criteria that was referenced on the office and the pay systems and all that. I'll just say that in terms of my business, our relationship with Mexico and our ability is to protect and promote U.S. Interests is critically important to border security. I routinely travel to Mexico, work with the State Department and all of the country team in Mexico City, so having our people deployed in a way that we can best protect and promote the interests of the United States is critically important.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Judd?

Mr. JUDD. When I came to testify, I came to testify about violence on the border and keeping U.S. Personnel safe.

As far as Mexican consulates go, I have no idea how to do that. All I can tell you is I am an expert in border security and what comes across the border and how we can better promote operations to effectively secure the border, and that's what I'm trying to give testimony on.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Okay. So that's kind of a separate discussion that you gentlemen are giving us, but I appreciate your coming, and those are sobering comments that both of you gave us.

In February of this year, in fact, right at the time of the spike of the violence at Matamoros area, I spent some time with my dear friend and colleague, Congressman Filemon Vela in Texas. In fact, we were right across the border from Matamoros at the time in February. I met with individuals from CBP who work tirelessly to make sure that our border is secure, most notably, and something that almost never gets mentioned, is keeping our borders secure from insects that would infiltrate our American crops. And I thank you for all the work in that regard.

I witnessed how vitally important our trade relationship is with Mexico. The U.S. is Mexico's largest foreign investor. More than 18,000 U.S. companies operate in Mexico. My State of Pennsylvania exports \$3.44 billion worth of goods to Mexico every year, so that accounts to 246,400 Pennsylvania jobs, so this is a subject of interest to me.

On my trip I learned about the role of the maquiladoras, the factories where Mexican workers assemble products for foreign companies. Most are U.S.-owned or subsidiaries and employ American managers and engineers, many of whom work in the Mexican maquiladoras as managers, middle managers by day, and then come back over the border to places like McAllen, Texas, where they live.

Our working relationship with Mexico is enormously important to our economic security; and as I witnessed, the work of the consulates is vital to that mission. Ms. Saarnio in your testimony you recognize the importance of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. You stated, "Two-Way trade topped \$500 billion in 2014, with 80 percent of that crossing the U.S.-Mexico land border." Ms. Saarnio, how do U.S. consulates facilitate our trade relationship with Mexico?

Ms. SAARNIO. Thank you, Congressman. That's an excellent question. Our consulates are very active with the business community on the ground in dealing with both security issues, but also in promoting the trade and the business that goes back and forth. The U.S. and Mexico share this very close North American trading relationship, but it's gotten deeper in the last 20 years after NAFTA. I have to say that I think our consulates, besides providing daily contact with the American companies there, they support business documents need to be signed. They need to be notarized. They need to help moving freight across the border. If something gets stopped because of the lack of paperwork or something, they'll work with them to help facilitate, and they make that trade more efficient on a daily basis.

Our consulates are very active in working with that, and it is my understanding the business community is very supportive of an active presence by the consulates in those regions.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Thank you, ma'am. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I thank the gentleman. I now recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Hurd, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HURD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank my colleague from Pennsylvania, Mr. Cartwright, in highlighting the problem of insects on the border. It's a real problem and something we deal with all the time. I represent over 820 miles of the border from Eagle Pass, Piedras Negras on the Mexican side, to El Paso, Ciudad Juarez, on the Mexican side, with Beto O'Rourke, Filemon Vela, and Henry Cuellar. We represent all of the Texas border, so this is something that we engage in on a weekly basis. And I don't have much time.

So my first question to you, Mr. Judd—and I'm going to try to keep our little tet-a-tet tight. We spent a lot of time here discussing the violence on the border and the danger of the border and that it's expanding in the interior. I was down the border last week in Ojinaga and Presidio, and I know one of the challenges I heard a lot was the lack of manpower in some of these locations, especially a place like Presidio. Can you tell us a little bit about what that means from an operations perspective, and if you can keep that answer tight.

Mr. JUDD. Absolutely. Without the manpower on the border, we can't properly—we just physically can't secure the border. We need men and women on the borders to do that. When you have specific areas like Presidio where the living conditions are absolutely horrendous, it's literally impossible to keep agents in that area, and so we need to do something. It was interesting that a couple years ago they took away the designation from Presidio.

Mr. HURD. You're reading my mind, brother. And so my understanding that some of these locations have changed their status from hardship posts, and I've seen a disproportionate share of agents leave or simply transfer out. Part of the move away from hardship designation was an effort to save money. Is the Union open to some form of solution that would allow an agent to move up in terms of the eligibility or preference for the next post if they spend a certain amount of time in a hardship posting?

Mr. JUDD. We have been pushing the Agency for that, and unfortunately they haven't reciprocated.

Mr. HURD. Excellent. And we're going to have some more conversations on that. Mr. Starr, Ambassador Moser, I want to thank you all and your organizations and your predecessors for what you do. I spent 9 years as an undercover officer in the CIA. I was in some really dangerous places like Pakistan, Afghanistan. I've been in embassies that have been bombed. I've been in embassies that have been shot up. I've been in embassies where thousands of people have marched on it, and because of the work of you all's two organizations, you had Mama Hurd's youngest son come home, and so I appreciate that and what you do.

My only real concern is the cost of some of these embassies. Texas A&M University built 110,000-seat stadium for about \$450 million. I think there's some expertise we can rely on there. But one of the problems that I actually have, and what I appreciate that you all do with the travel advisory in Mexico, the advisory in Mexico is the only advisory where you all split it up by state. Right? And I think that shows the important relationship that we have with Mexico. We can secure our border. I know Mr. Judd and his colleagues are working hard every single day, and we can facilitate the movement of goods and services at the same time. We must. And that's super important.

So Juarez, 2008, the murder capital of the world. 2010, half has many murders as Detroit and New Orleans. Ojinaga, right, there's less murders in Ojinaga in 2014 than there were in Baltimore. So my concern is when we talk about Mexico is a big place, 80 percent of the violence is in 20 percent of the country. That's about five states. And if you break that down into municipalities, it's about 20 municipalities out of hundreds.

And I get frustrated when we try to talk about Mexico as one place, and it's not. And so I'm just looking to work with you all on making sure that the travel advisories in some of these cities are reflective of the needs on the grounds. And I made a comment when I was in Ojinaga. I've been in some pretty dangerous places, and Ojinaga is not one of them.

And I'm looking just for you all's opinions on being able to ensure that those travel advisories are reflective of those communities, because on the border, it's not two communities. It's one community. And the importance of trade and people, goods and services going back and forth, is so critical to this country. What's good for northern Mexico is good for southern United States, and it's good for both countries. And, Mr. Starr, your comments, please.

Mr. STARR. Thank you, Congressman. Specifically to that topic, both OSAC and the warnings that we work with from each individual consulate and the OSAC country councils and city councils that we have, look specifically at the areas.

The consular warning sheets are countrywide, but there are also post-security bulletins that come out from the consulate, and I think this is one of the arguments for why we have consulates in different places. American citizens can go to that Web site for each individual consulate and look at what's going on in that immediate area. I recognize that, yes, sometimes the consular warning sheets are a rather blunt tool because we have I think, Sue, is it over 25

million Americans a year visit Mexico, and we do have to give them sort of honest, open advice, but we also further break it down for those people that are in specific areas, and we try to do that. But I will take your concerns back with me.

Mr. HURD. Thank you very much. And my last point, and I'm already over time—I apologize, Chairman. Ms. Saarnio, please communicate to the members of the Foreign Service, and they're sometimes overlooked at the difficulty of their job. They're doing it in hard places. They're working hard every single day to export our soft power around the world, and they do it in tough places. I recognize that. I had the honor of serving side-by-side with many of those. Thank you for what you do and please communicate that back.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you. I'll now recognize Ms. Kelly for 5 minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Everyone here today would agree that the Mexican Government must work to enhance security in their country. The violent crime that takes place in some places in Mexico, taking into consideration what my colleague just said, often resonates across the border here in the United States and simply cannot be ignored.

We know that American firearms often turn up at crime scenes in Mexico. In March, the ATF reported that out of 104,850 guns traced between 2009 and 2014, 70 percent originated in the United States. Mr. Harris, I'm sure that Customs and Border Patrol encounters many guns at the border. Do you agree that the consistent flow of firearms from the U.S. Across the border to Mexico is a serious problem?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, ma'am. I had responded to a previous question. I think our men and women do a great job on southbound inspections. The OFO personnel who are doing sometimes random southbound inspections are oftentimes augmented by Border Patrol agents detailed over to assist with that effort. And the firearms that are seized during southbound operations without the aid of intelligence or investigative information are largely due to the hard work of the men and women.

However, as I'm sure you know, we do not have the same level of technology and inspection capabilities going southbound as we have northbound. And I think if we would have some similar technology, the backscatters and other nonintrusive inspection capabilities to augment the great work of the men and women on southbound inspections, it would probably help us to do a better job of seizing more weapons going into Mexico, which, as you indicate, is a problem.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you.

In 2008, the Mexican ambassador to the United States pled with the U.S. to do something to help stem the flow of weapons into his country, saying, "Between Texas and Arizona alone, you've got 12,000 gun shops along that border with Mexico, and a lot of these gun shops provide weapons that feed into organized crime in Mexico. So we really need the support of the United States."

Ms. Saarnio, do you agree with that, American firearms are contributing to the violence within Mexico or some parts of Mexico?

Ms. SAARNIO. Thank you, Congresswoman. I think the problem of violence in Mexico and as it crosses over in the United States is a problem that we share with Mexico. We share a common border. We share many issues. They're multifaceted issues. I think we have to deal with problems on our side of the border and the Mexicans have to deal with problems on their side of the border, and we do work very closely with them on it. But I am sure that if we were to deal with some of these issues in our side, they would be appreciated in Mexico.

Ms. KELLY. This is a tremendous problem because one of the principal tactics used by criminals to obtain these weapons is straw purchasing. And I know my colleagues have already raised this issue, and I'm proud to join Ranking Member Cummings and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney to introduce the bipartisan Gun Trafficking Prevention Act of 2015, House Resolution 3455. I feel this bill will close this glaring loophole and would help with the issue. So thank you.

And I yield back.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I'd like to make a note here that the—from Homeland Security Customs and Border Patrol, this is the number of seizures of guns on the southwest border in 2015, 60. Six zero. That's it.

If you look at the ATF statistic, some 8,200 traces in a category called U.S.-sourced firearms. I want to be careful, because U.S. source, under the definition provided by the ATF, refers to those firearms that were determined by ATF to be manufactured in the United States or legally imported into the United States by an FFL, a Federal firearms licensee.

So legal transportation of it, they may have been used in a crime, but if they were manufactured in the United States, they would also fall into that statistic. So I think it is a little bit high. And if anybody on this panel is concerned about the illegal flow of guns, then you've got to look first at what the Obama administration did in Fast and Furious.

And this panel, this Oversight Committee asked for the documents from the State Department and from others about the operation—or from the Department of Justice, I should say, about Fast and Furious. Did the administration work with us in an open and candid way? No. Did the administration provide the documents to Congress? No. We had to take them to court. In fact, that is still pending. Because the Government through the Department of Justice knowingly and willingly gave the drug cartels nearly 2,000 weapons.

So we can drag out Mr. Holder and other people in the Obama administration, but they gave out nearly 2,000 AK-47s to the drug cartels, and we want to look at that. We had to hold the attorney general in contempt of Congress. We had to actually go to the courts to try to get those documents. We still don't have those documents.

So for people to say, "Oh, we're worried about the drugs or the guns that are going back and forth," let's look at what our government did in a complicit way to provide the drug cartels those weapons. That is an investigation this committee will continue. It's still in the courts. And it's one of the most outrageous things to happen.

So I would actually agree with the gentlewoman. But it shouldn't start with our government knowingly giving those weapons to the drug cartels.

Thanks everybody for their indulgence.

I now recognize the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Walker, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate your passion on this issue.

I want to talk a little bit about—go the direction concerning human trafficking and human smuggling, if I could, and I want to tie it into the border crossing cards. I have a question, what are the risks of these thieves that are able to duplicate these cards? Is that possible of the 11,500 that were made? Because I have a card here as well, and it's a card that I use here in D.C. Sometimes I'll use it to vote. Other times I just show it and I'm kind of granted access here. So help me understand. Can that be duplicated?

Mr. STARR. Sir, they have features in them that make it very difficult to do a photo substitution or duplicate them.

I think the other thing that's important to remember on the cards that were stolen, that anybody that's actually trying to do illegal activity would not want to use one of those cards that was stolen because every one of those is registered electronically as a stolen card now. So if they go to the border and show it, it automatically rings a bell and, you know, these people are going to be doubly inspected.

So we have a high degree of confidence that the cards that were stolen, the majority have been recovered. Those that haven't been, very difficult to duplicate and likely that the cartels or anybody else engaged in illegal business would not want to use them.

Mr. WALKER. And the RFID can be turned off remotely. So are we under the impression—I mean, is this something that we can go on record saying those are 100 percent inoperable? Those cards are now rendered completely useless, that they would not be used by someone trying to smuggle a human being? Is that fair to say?

Mr. STARR. I would think, sir, that nobody that's in the smuggling business is going to try to go legally across a border would want to use one of those cards that's entered as stolen. And as I say, that would raise the profile. What they would really want is to steal a card from a legal user that's not been declared stolen that has a similarity on it to the person on it. But still, even the biometrics then are not going to be the same.

Mr. WALKER. So it's not just something that they could use ever as far as an ID card or passing through anything. These cards now, once they've been deactivated, so to speak, if that's the right terminology, there's no way they can use those at any place or any location for whatever purpose?

Mr. STARR. Sir, I wouldn't go that far. I think, you know, along the border where there's active inspection of them, I think they'll be detected very quickly. I think people do use them for other purposes. But, again, if the photograph doesn't match, and they're very hard to do photo substitutions without destroying that card, it would be very difficult.

Mr. WALKER. Okay. Mr. Judd, do you have any concern or other comments on that?

Mr. JUDD. No. The ports of entry, I don't work at the port of entry. I work between the ports of entry. For me, it would be very difficult if somebody took a card from, like for instance my card. If somebody took my card and I encounter them in the interior, there's no way for me to actually run that through the checks that Mr. Starr currently—

Mr. WALKER. Fair enough. I'm satisfied with that answer.

Let me ask you this: In moving forward, have we pretty much solidified that this mistake is now moving forward? This won't happen again? Is that something we've looked into, as far as how this was broken, how this was stolen, how these things got lost to begin with?

Mr. STARR. I visited the transit facility that they went out of, sir, talked with the employees there. There had been a very hard look at how we were moving those cards. We have made some changes in how they're delivered. We are now only—I would prefer not to speak about some of the ways that we have gone into making some of those changes, sir, but we did look closely at it.

I think our consular sheets are still accurate, that, you know, hijacking and carjacking can still be—is very, you know, a problem in Mexico and we have to watch out for that. But we are taking additional measures to try to ensure that this doesn't occur again.

Mr. WALKER. Well, I appreciate you doing—did I hear somebody else weigh in? I'm sorry.

Human trafficking in my State, North Carolina, even that far away from the border is now number nine in the country. We were able to pass early on training for border security. That piece of legislation is now law. This is a very technologically advanced, even in our own research here we're showing, even some of your reports showing these aren't just ma and pa. These have been kind of assimilated into these large international organizations, if we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to shut that down at the border. Appreciate your help.

And with that, I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. If the gentleman will yield. How many border crossing cards are there in circulation? Do you have any idea? Millions, right?

Mr. STARR. Millions, sir. Certainly tens of millions.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So the idea is that Mexican nationals can get a border crossing card that is valid for 24 hours—for is it 24 hours in the United States? It's a day pass basically.

Mr. STARR. By State, there are distances that they can go within a certain State with them and other limitations on them.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So the idea is that you can basically go for the day, go shopping in, say, Nogales and then go back across the border. But there are millions of them. There's no exit program, correct? Do you have any way—Mr. Judd, are you scanning any—how many of the border crossing cards that are used daily are scanned in their exit?

Mr. JUDD. That I'm aware of, none.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. How many are scanned on the inbound?

Mr. JUDD. All of them.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So we have statistics about how many come into the United States and we have zero statistics on how

many actually leave the United States. What's the consequence of being caught in the United States with just a border crossing card?

Mr. JUDD. Next to nothing.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. So we give out millions of passes, we have no exit program, we have no way of verifying, and there's no consequence if you do it anyway. And so thousands of them get stolen. I'm still worried that they're used many ways as a flash pass saying, "Yeah, I'm here legally. I'm just here for the day." Even though in some places you can only go 25 miles into the United States. In other places, I think it's up to 40 miles, if I'm not mistaken. But it's not supposed to be your free entry into the United States of America, and yet it's just inexcusable you have no exit program to be able to scan these passes.

I'll yield back. My apologies.

Ms. Plaskett, you're now recognized for a very generous 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Very generous, I like that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And good afternoon to all of you.

I'm sitting here and I know that we're talking about consulate construction, but I just came home from the U.S. Virgin Islands, which is now, along with Puerto Rico, considered the fourth border. And we had a weekend of violence that was profound, with a young man being gunned down in a daycare parking lot while his wife went to pick up their child; 100 shots being fired in the early evening in another part of the town; and then the following morning in front of a high school at 9:00 in the morning, granted it was a Saturday, another individual being gunned down.

And I understand that a lot of this is, one, due to economic non-opportunity, failing schools, but also because of the guns and drugs that come through borders like my own. And when I look at, in 2007, that the U.S. and Mexico began what I hear is called the Merida Initiative, which, according to the State Department, is an initiative with four general goals: To disrupt criminal organizations, strengthen judicial institutions, improve border infrastructure and technology, and improve stability in the Mexican community.

I wish that places like Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands had an initiative with its own government like that. But when I see some of the bills that are coming through and the lack of appropriations and the lack of support I'm getting from many of my colleagues on that, it makes me question if any of that's ever going to happen.

But I know we're here supposed to talk about consulate construction and progress in Mexico, and so I've digressed and I'll get back on topic to what I was supposed to be talking about.

I was fortunate to go with my colleague, Mr. Chaffetz, to Mexico in May because I was interested in seeing how borders and consulates operate to stem not just the tide of illegal drugs and guns and individuals coming undocumented into this country, but also the amount of work and cooperation that's done in agriculture as well in places like between Mexico and the United States, and the amount of trade and consumer goods and commerce that happens in these areas.

And so we went and we visited the site where the new Mexico City Embassy was supposed to be built. And I understand that there are a lot of consulates in this area because of the amount of commerce and trade along with individuals that go on in these areas.

So I wanted to ask—and I think, Mr. Moser, you would be the appropriate person—the three consulates in dangerous areas near the border, Tijuana, Juarez, Monterrey, they’ve all recently been completed in 2008, 2011, and 2014 respectively. Is that correct?

Mr. MOSER. Yes, that’s Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and Monterrey.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And all of these three consulates meet security standards?

Mr. MOSER. Ma’am, I cannot build a building without Mr. Starr’s explicit approval.

Ms. PLASKETT. So Mr. Starr, did they meet your approval?

Mr. STARR. Yes, they do.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And there’s another consulate that’s currently under construction that’s estimated to be completed in 2017. Mr. Starr, is that correct? Is that accurate?

Mr. STARR. Yes.

Ms. PLASKETT. And then this consulate in Matamoros and the Embassy in Mexico City are also supposed to soon be under construction?

Mr. MOSER. Yes, ma’am, that’s correct.

Ms. PLASKETT. The four remaining consulates are in the site acquisition phase for new locations, correct?

Mr. MOSER. That’s correct, ma’am.

Ms. PLASKETT. And as for the completion timelines, when we travel to Mexico City, they were told that the Matamoros consulate was estimated to be completed in 2019 and Mexico City Embassy estimated to be finished in 2020. Are those timelines still in place?

Mr. MOSER. Yes, ma’am. They do depend somewhat on Mexico City’s case about when we will receive the clean site.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And as I recall, the clean site was not for the entire space. It was for a portion of that embassy?

Mr. MOSER. For a very small portion in the southern corner of the site.

Ms. PLASKETT. And do we have an idea when Mexico’s—the government will give that?

Mr. MOSER. Ma’am, we are working with our seller in order to obtain the clean site, and we are working currently on a timeline for the delivery of that, and we expect it to be sometime in the fall of 2016.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. And can you explain how State is responding to the delays in that, aside from just working with the seller?

Mr. MOSER. If you mean how we’re responding, I will say this: You know, we looked for 10 years, over a decade, at 20 different sites in Mexico City to find one that would meet our very robust and—by this hearing everyone acknowledges—very important diplomatic platform that we have in Mexico City.

When we finally identified from our seller the Nuevo Blanco site, which is a short couple mile distance from our current location, we realized that this would actually fulfill all of our programmatic needs, from providing an effective platform for our law enforcement

agencies to our traditional diplomatic activities, to even providing space for a Benjamin Franklin library, which is very important for our public diplomacy outreach.

Yes, there have been delays in acquiring the site, but we still feel that within this timeline that this is sufficient for us to build a building from the time we receive the site and get it up and operational. And that construction timeline is around 50 months.

Ms. PLASKETT. And when I talked with the people on the site, primarily—one of the main reasons why this was such a great site is because the ability to buy land of that size from multiple sellers is almost impossible in Mexico City.

Mr. MOSER. Yes, ma'am, that is correct. Because, you know—and one of the things I want to note here, you know, it would've been—it would've been possible, of course, to find a greenfield site if we wanted to be well outside of Mexico City.

But to the extent that we need to engage with our colleagues in the Mexican Government and in businesses, we need to be in an urban location that really mirrors our present diplomatic platform.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Thank you so much. I've exhausted my gracious and generous time.

And thank you, Mr. Chair, for your generosity.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin, Mr. Judd, with you. Is it your understanding—okay. I know that you said you don't work at the ports of entry. But is it your understanding that the BCC cards can be used by individuals illegally to get into the country?

Mr. JUDD. The BCC cards, if somebody is not properly looking and inspecting who the person is, for instance if you come through the port of entry and you present your card and they don't look at you and they just swipe it and it's a good card and they pass you through, absolutely they can do that.

But the cards really are, as Mr. Starr said, they're very good cards. They're very difficult to duplicate. But if you have somebody else's cards and they don't properly inspect you, you could get into the United States.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Is there any evidence, Mr. Starr, that that has ever happened?

Mr. STARR. Not to my knowledge yet, sir, no.

Mr. HICE. All right. So you would say that no one has ever entered this country with a stolen card?

Mr. STARR. Sir, that would be very hard to say absolutely. I would say that—

Mr. HICE. Yes, it would.

Mr. STARR. —it would be very difficult.

Mr. HICE. It would be very difficult. Because from what I understand that has happened and there are times inspectors don't check the cards properly so there certainly are occasions where, as the chairman brought up earlier, they're used as flash cards.

How often does an individual just flash the card and they're waived on into the country?

Mr. STARR. Sir, I can only tell you, I spent about 3 hours at the San Ysidro border crossing with the Homeland Security personnel that were there. I saw an incredibly dedicated group of people with very many duplicative stops where they're checking the people, they check the cars. I can't tell you, because it's out of—I'm with the State Department, but I have to tell you I was exceptionally impressed with how good they were.

Mr. HICE. Did they know you were there?

Mr. STARR. Yes, they did.

Mr. HICE. Okay. That probably has something to do with it.

Is it true that the CBP was only able to read the cards, the RFID cards about two-thirds of the time?

Mr. STARR. I'm sorry, sir. I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. HICE. It's my understanding that the cards don't always work properly. And so my question, ultimately, is coming to if the cards don't always work properly then the stolen cards could still be used.

Mr. Harris, you're nodding your head.

Mr. HARRIS. Well, I didn't notice I was doing that, but—

Mr. HICE. Okay. It appeared to be you were.

Mr. HARRIS. —it was an accident, I guess.

I'm not a port-of-entry expert but, again, I'll defer to my area of responsibility in what I'm focused on, which is targeting the criminal network. I will tell you, through investigative means I won't talk about here, we're getting much better at identifying and rooting out those individuals who are using the border crossing cards for criminal purposes.

We've identified, as a starting point in South Texas, a little bit less than 1,000 individuals. Probably about half of those are border crossers. And we're systemically removing the cards from those individuals when they cross the border. So I think with the technology that you all have supported us with, we're much better at being able to identify the people who are using the cards for illicit purposes versus for legitimate reasons.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So none of you have any awareness of the RFID cards not working?

Mr. STARR. No, sir, I'm not aware that they're not working. I think we have a very high degree of confidence in the card and a very high success rate with that card.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Mr. Starr, do you have any idea how many—or any of you, for that matter—how many U.S. citizens have disappeared, have been kidnapped, abducted?

Mr. STARR. I don't have the figures in front of me, sir, no.

Mr. HICE. Who would have those figures?

Ms. SAARNIO. Sir, I have some figures from last year and this year. If we're talking about U.S. citizens—

Mr. HICE. Correct.

Ms. SAARNIO. —we believe from the reports that we have that in 2014 we had a total case of 146 kidnappings reported, U.S. citizens. And in this year through September 8, we have had 64 cases reported.

Mr. HICE. All right. What about other crimes from disappearances to abductions?

Ms. SAARNIO. Other crimes are also down. In terms of violent crimes, we look at murder cases. Last year we had—there were about 100 murder cases reported of homicides involving American citizens. This year we're counting 89 so far to date.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Is there any evidence of Americans being targeted?

Ms. SAARNIO. Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr. HICE. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know my time is up.

I would just like to add that I have put forth—Mr. Judd mentioned a while ago about the horrible crime committed in Montana after a person was in your hands, and I put forth a bill, TRAC, which stands for Tracking Re-offending Alien Criminals, specifically the sex offenders. I would urge my colleagues to check that out, H.R. 2793, and cosponsor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

And we don't have the—necessarily the proper panelists to deal with this part of it, but to lead on, to follow up with what you said, one of the most infuriating parts of this are the people who are here illegally and commit crimes only to be released back into the interior of the United States of America.

For fiscal year 2013 and 2014, the Obama administration released roughly 66,000 criminal aliens. According to enforcement and removal operations, there are 925,000 people with final orders to be removed from the country who have not—that they haven't been removed.

You know, there are people that are here illegally, and then there are people that are here illegally and they committed a crime. And to not focus on those people and make sure that they leave the country—and then when they do, to find that a huge percentage of them have to get picked up coming back across the border, I mean, how do you look people in the eye and say 925,000 people are here illegally or ordered to leave the country and they did not.

And then you add on top of that the number of other criminals, they're in our possession. We have them. They were caught. They were convicted. And we said, "Go ahead. You're released." And we have horrific stories in just about every single State you can think about. And it's just horrendous.

We're now pleased to recognize Mr. Cuellar who lives in Texas. He's very dedicated on this issue. We appreciate him and glad to waive him in by unanimous consent. We'll now recognize him for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Chairman, thank you again for allowing me to be back in my former committee. Thank you and thank the ranking member also.

I want to thank the witnesses from the State Department. Thank you for the good job that you do. I know it's a difficult job, but we appreciate it.

My good friend Robert Harris, who used to live in Laredo, moved to the northern part of my district of San Antonio. It's always a good pleasure to see you and all the good work you did down there.

Mr. Judd, all your men and women that work for Border Patrol—I mean that work along with you and with Robert and all that, they do a good job. You know, I think anybody on the border—as you know, my brother is Border Patrol—I mean, well, border sheriff should I say down there in the border. So he and I, you know, we’ve lived there all my life. Like I said, I drink the water. I breathe the air down there. My family lives there. I go back every weekend back to the border. So I do want to say thank you for all the work that you all do.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I do know there’s a couple issues, and I think there’s some things that I would like to work with you, as we talked a while ago. I want to talk about danger pay. I think on danger pay, for the folks at the State Department, I think we need to talk about it. I think that’s something that I think Congress will probably be involved in this issue.

My understanding is you already let some of your employees know—you haven’t let us know, but I can tell you that Congress will probably have a say so on this. Not that we want to micro-manage, but I think it’s part of—at least the appropriations process will be involved.

The issue of cost of construction—and I understand—I’ve been to the one in Mexico. I understand what they’re doing over in Laredo and other parts of the world. I think the cost of construction is extremely high. Sometimes people, I think, they charge us just because we’re the Federal Government, they charge us more. I understand all the arguments about security and you’ve got to do this. I understand all that, but I still think they’re a little high.

On the issues of closing the consulate, Mr. Chairman, I think we definitely disagree on that. I don’t think we ought to close the consulates. Let me just try to address, Mr. Chairman, if you allow me just a few minutes beyond my 5 minutes, since I think everybody’s gone now except you and I. Let me talk about the border. I want to go from the border and then go into Mexico.

If you look at the FBI statistics, the border crime rate or the national crime rate is about 4.5 murders per 100,000. Laredo, my hometown, is about 1.5 murders per 100,000. You take the border crime rate, it’s lower than the national crime rate using FBI stats, murder, assaults, rapes, you know, name them.

If you look at the top ten cities with the highest murder rates in the U.S. for 100,000 population, none of them are on the border. None of them are on the border. If you look at one of the NGOs that looked at the top 50 cities with the highest homicides per 100,000, and if you look at it, you know, you have San Pedro Sula—this is from the year 2011 to 2014—number one is in Honduras, San Pedro Sula, Honduras. You had Acapulco, number three, 104 murders for 100,000. The number one was about 171 murders per 100,000.

Then you go on—sorry if there’s anybody—any of my colleagues—San Luis was number 19. And then you had Detroit, number 22. Then you had Juarez, who the numbers I’ve gone down was number 27. Then you had the Nuevo Laredo, number 34. Then you had Baltimore number 40, and then go all the way down to Cuernavaca in Mexico on that.

So, again, I would ask you to look at some of these numbers because there's always the reality and the perception. And being on the border, I'll be the first one to say, Mr. Chairman, you know, there are problems like any other city, but it's not the way some people paint it to be.

Travel warnings, again, if we go based on travel warnings that I—we pulled out the travel warnings that the State Department has. Yes, I do see Mexico here, but I do see so many other countries where there's travel warnings. And if we go on the basis of travel warning, Mr. Chairman, I think we probably have to close consulates.

And there's two and-a-half pages of countries that we probably have to include, including one of the ones that we're dealing with this week or maybe I just saw a note that we might postpone the Israel issue. Even the West Bank and Gaza, there's a travel warning there on that. So I can go on two and-a-half pages of countries if we happen to go on that.

Why do we need consulates on that even in places like Mexico? Two reasons: One is the trade and the relations that we have, but the other one has to do with immigration itself first.

Before I go on that, let me just talk about Mexico. Before we did plan Merida, and in 2008 we worked with Ambassador Garza, President Bush, Roberta Jacobson, which I'm hoping will become—will soon be the Ambassador of Mexico. Mr. Chairman, she's a good lady to know. I think you might know her. She'll be a great Ambassador to Mexico.

We were giving Mexico \$36 million a year, while we give certain countries like Israel \$3.1 billion a year. And here is Mexico, which is one of our greatest trading partners. Mr. Chairman, I think you highlighted some of the numbers. But let me talk about Laredo where you and Blake—and I'm sorry I couldn't be there. I was bringing my little girl up to Washington the day you were up here.

But Laredo, for example, handles about 40 percent of all the trade between the U.S. and Mexico. Twelve thousand trailers a day that we have there. If you put the trucks, line them up, up and down the border, on the day basis, all the trucks Laredo on 1 day would go from Laredo to a little bit south of San Antonio. You put all the trucks on a monthly basis going through just Laredo, it will go from Laredo all the way to La Paz, Bolivia.

And if you go on the number of trucks that pass Laredo on a year, they almost will wrap around the world twice. So it gives you the half trillion dollars that we have of trade every day. Shows you why Mexico is so important to us.

And by the way, one more for the folks that want to push Mexico away, if an end port comes in from China, it has about a 4 percent American parts on it. If something comes in from Canada, our number one trading partner, will have about 25 percent parts. But if something comes in from Mexico, an import comes in from Mexico, it will have 40 percent American parts with it. So that shows the connection that we have with Mexico.

Trade. Let me go into immigration, part of it. Robert, you and I spoke a lot—Mr. Harris, we spoke a lot about the unaccompanied kids that came in last year on that. We've seen the numbers gone down, Mr. Chairman. They've gone down. They're about half. But,

again, we can add more Border Patrol—and I agree adding more Border Patrol. I want to see more men and women in blue, which are the customs officers. But if you look at something that has happened, I've always said that we can't play defense on the 1 yard line, which is called the U.S. border.

We spend about \$18 billion for border security across the Nation. If we just play a little different defense on the 20-yard line—and last year the appropriations, we added—I think we worked with you all—we added about \$80 million to help Mexico secure the southern border with Guatemala.

We always talk about southern border, but we ought to look at the southern border with Mexico. If you look at it, from October 2014 to April 2015, Mexico apprehended over 92,000 Central American migrants, 20,000 more than we do in the U.S., 70,000. So if we would have—if Mexico would allow those 92,000, Border Patrol would have been dealing with those folks a lot more.

So Mr. Chairman, I do understand that we have issues in Mexico. There's no ifs. But we need to work with them. Construction costs, I agree; I think they're a little high. We can work on that. Closing the consulates, bad mistake. Danger pay, Mr. Chairman, I want to work with you because I think we need to talk about. There are certain parts of Mexico where I think they deserve danger pay.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for allowing me to be back in my former committee.

And to all the witnesses, thank you so much for all of—for all the good work that you do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank you.

I'll now recognize the gentleman from Wisconsin for 5 minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. I've been in another hearing so I hope I don't repeat some questions.

First of all, I want to point out that overall, you know, we're kind of highlighting Mexico here. And just reviewing the murder rates around the country, Mexico was far from the most violent country in the world, right? I mean, you have countries like Jamaica or El Salvador that are maybe twice the murder rate or Honduras which is four times the murder rate of Mexico.

But Mexico does have a high murder rate. I think it's about four times—over four times the American rate. Five times—I say four times the American rate. I wonder if some of you could maybe comment on the differences in some cities compared to other cities and whether you think it is right now particularly dangerous in these cities with the higher rates themselves.

Mr. STARR. Sir, I think the Embassy in Mexico City and the different types of agencies that are represented there closely follow where we have rising narcotrafficking drug violence. And I think that's what fuels a lot of the murder rates.

As we said earlier, you know, 25 million Americans visit Mexico every single year. Very few of those people have any type of problem there. You know, tourism is a very big business. We're acutely aware that certain places where the drug cartels, either one is trying to take over another or there's a split in the organization, and

that's what happened in Matamoros over the last year essentially, the violence can certainly spike.

I think we do try to differentiate between those places where the violence is going up and make sure that that's reflected in our warnings and tell people that. I think we try to be accurate about what the real threats are to Americans there and give them the general idea. But it is not a level of violence that is all over Mexico. It is in different cities and primarily where the drug traffickers are contesting territory.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Do we have a facility in Acapulco?

Mr. STARR. We have a consular agency there, right? Not a consulate. We have a consular agent there.

Mr. GROTHMAN. That's an example of one, just pulling it up, that looks to be a very, very dangerous city. But could you let me know, I mean, is that like some American cities where overall it's dangerous but there are a lot of areas that are okay? I mean, because that is one, just pulling it up, that is just, you know, I think the murder rate is like three times that in Milwaukee where I'm near, and that's not a very well run city.

But you do feel that—I mean, do you feel our people are safe in a city like that? If you stick in the right areas, or is it—

Ms. SAARNIO. Sir, we provide guidance in our travel advisories by state and even by city, and there is specific guidance for Acapulco. I'm not sure over there what it is right now. Typically, we advise people, you know, stay off the streets at night in these dangerous places. Stay closer to home. If we know of a particular type of violence that's going to occur, we'll issue a warning.

So I think, you know—we think it's manageable, but we do have to monitor the situations, and we have to monitor the risk and take measures to mitigate against those risks when they happen.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Just by point of reference, of all the Americans working in Mexico right now who work for the American Government, how many work there overall and how many have been victims, say, of some sort of crime in the last year?

Ms. SAARNIO. We have 2,800 employees, that includes our locally-engaged staff as well, and the mission in Mexico. I don't have a number for how many have been involved in crimes, but it's minimal. I don't know that we have those at hand right now.

Mr. STARR. I think since 2010, we've had two Americans that were killed.

Ms. SAARNIO. Since 1985.

Mr. STARR. Right.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Since 1985—

Ms. SAARNIO. Two Americans have been killed.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Since when?

Ms. SAARNIO. Since 1985.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. So two Americans have been killed out of a little under 3—when we have 3,000 employees. We've had about two murders in the last 30 years is what you're saying?

Ms. SAARNIO. That's right.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Okay. Thank you.

I yield the rest of my time.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Thank the gentleman.

Few kind of tie-up questions and then we'll be done here.

Ambassador Moser, in Mexico City, the last number we had is that we were planning in the new embassy—and I recognize that it's behind schedule—we were planning on 1,335 desks. The costs had gone from the original estimate of \$577 million to \$943 million. Any adjustments in those, or are those still the numbers that you're working with?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, those are correct, but I will note that the original figure, the \$550 million figure that we initially reported to Congress did not include the site acquisition cost. And that's the reason. So the real difference is about 700 versus 900, and that does reflect the 40 percent growth in staffing.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And it's real dollars. You know, every time we spend dollars here we're pulling money out of American people's pockets to give it to somebody else. And so the concern is you have a \$200 million growth there. You were looking at roughly just shy of \$250 million for the building, the construction of Matamoros and the Nuevo Laredo facilities. That's a huge amount of dollars going out the door, when you consider that Matamoros is looking at 103 desks and Nuevo Laredo is 88 desks. And we're going to spend a quarter of a billion dollars.

Mr. MOSER. Sir, if I could just make one comment on that.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Sure.

Mr. MOSER. I too am very, very concerned about the cost of these facilities, and we are always focused on the cost. But it is true that it does take more money per capita or per desk to build a smaller facility than it does a large one. Because as I've said, the first point of all of this is your requirements. What do you have to do. And it's easier to expand a building and make it bigger to get a per-desk charge than it is.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. In Monterrey—well, let me jump in here. Same country, right. In Monterrey, \$179 million for 199 desks, but Matamoros, which is 103 desks, is \$191 million.

Mr. MOSER. Well, as I said, it depends on the requirements for the various locations. And a smaller number of—

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Do you make any situation where the cost has gone down?

Mr. MOSER. Yes, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Okay. What is it?

Mr. MOSER. Well, there are places where it's surprisingly inexpensive in—

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, but where is the place where the cost estimate went down, came in under budget or even on budget?

Mr. MOSER. I'll have to get back to you.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, exactly. Because we looked at this. The reason that we are going to continue to focus on this is every single thing we've done since the time I was elected, since the President took place—took office, the same time, every one of these facilities has gone up in costs. Every one of them. And they're not even close. We didn't come up with those estimates. The State Department came up with those statements. And now we're seeing this double-digits percentage growth by the billions of dollars. I mean, by the billions.

Let me keep going because we are trying to wrap this up. In Nuevo Laredo, when I went and visited the site, beautiful site, I

can understand the location, the proximity to Laredo, Texas, I get it. And I do believe that they need a new facility. The one they're in currently is old. I understand that. But on that site there were living quarters that were a potential living quarters for the consulate general.

The recommendation for the people on the ground who are working there was to keep that facility. And yet, OBO said, "No, we're not going to keep that facility," and they destroyed it. I have questions on follow-up as to why was it destroyed? Why didn't it meet the specifications? And number two is, have you figured out and determined where the consulate general is actually going to live in Nuevo Laredo?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, there's a very good line of inquiry. And let me explain that. That in that particular instance, we had a smallish site, somewhere around a little—I think a little bit less than 5 acres. And in order for us to situate our building on the site and have all of the required setbacks and all the required security requirements that we would have to have, according to our overseas security standards, that we had to demolish the existing residence on the site.

Now, where will that person go? We will obtain appropriate housing for the principal officer, and that's what we do in countries all over the world.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Here's the concern: The cost has grown; it's under construction; the site has been—but this is a pretty—there are only 88 desks, okay. It's a smaller facility. The consulate general and his facilities and his ability or her ability to conduct work on behalf of the United States is pivotal. And here we are, you know, into September 2015, and you all haven't figured out where he's going to live. It's a pretty big, important question.

So—

Mr. MOSER. Well, he does have a residence now, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yes, understood, on the old compound. But you have to travel, as I did, we had something like 30 armed guards escort us from the one facility to the next facility. You had to have the Mexican National Army lead us in a convoy with, you know, some rather large guns and whatnot ready to go at any moment. It's a very dangerous situation.

So I just don't understand why we're this far into it. Because there's going to be a cost. And so when we look at \$154 million, that doesn't include the site acquisition or development or purchase of something for the consulate general, does it?

Mr. MOSER. No, sir, it doesn't.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Have you informed Congress that this number is shy of what it needs to be?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, we usually find principal officers or fund principal officers' residence out of our leasehold account, which is also appropriation from Congress. And we do have a dialogue with our appropriators about how much these individual residences cost.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Okay. It's amazing that you get down there and see that there's no plan and no—other than, "Hey, we're going to continue to look at it." To suggest that they took 10 years to try to find a facility to locate the Mexico City Embassy. I mean, that's an embarrassment. Ten years?

Mr. MOSER. Sir, to find a big enough site where we can put a facility that really accomplishes the diplomatic goals, we are trying to——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. You bought a site that's toxic. And by the Mexican Government it's so toxic you can't build there. And there are hundreds of people that are going to suffer and live in inadequate working quarters.

Again, I want to try to wrap up here. When will the new danger pay—when will this new program be implemented? Has it been announced?

Mr. MOSER. It has been announced, sir, but I'll turn that over to my colleagues.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. When does that take place?

Mr. STARR. The announcements went out to the post, I believe, last week.

Congressman, I appreciate how much you're concerned about the danger pay. I can have staff come up here and work with your staff and explain how we do this and how we grade these things, if that would be helpful.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. We'll try it again. You and I tried it in a classified setting, and it didn't go so well, did it?

Mr. STARR. No, sir, we had our differences.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah. And so this is not a new topic that I sprung on you here at this—you knew I was going to bring it up.

Mr. STARR. I know that, sir. But I think if we could show you detailed how we actually look at each post, what the ratings are, what we do to go into it, and I think my staff working with your staff could give you——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I look forward to seeing that formula. For those men and women who work in Mexico, who have loved ones that are here in the United States and their husband or wife or sibling or whoever, daughter, whatever is working in Mexico, and their pay just got cut, you can look at the Obama administration, you could look at Secretary Kerry, and you could look to that organization, because it wasn't us Republicans. Don't tell us that it was—you were tight on budgets.

Mr. STARR. This was not about cutting any benefits.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. They did get their—are you telling me that——

Mr. STARR. Matamoros went up. Matamoros went up.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Are there people working in Mexico who earn less than they did before?

Mr. STARR. Yes, some.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. That's my problem.

Mr. STARR. But it's based on the conditions on the ground, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah. Can they still—in Nuevo Laredo can they walk outside of the consulate? No, they can't.

Mr. STARR. No. They can be across the border and be in a Wal-Mart and be in a Dairy Queen very quickly.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Really?

Mr. STARR. Yes, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, I can't wait to play that video for those people working there. Shame on you for——

Mr. STARR. Sir, I've walked that ground. I've talked with those people. I look at our security every single day. There is nobody that is more concerned with the security of our people overseas than I am. Their allowances——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I don't agree with you.

Mr. STARR. I'm sorry, sir.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. I have been there. I have talked to those people.

Mr. STARR. Sir, I start every morning——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Don't tell me that—don't get on your high horse, because you just cut their pay. I didn't do that; you did.

Mr. STARR. Sir——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And when I went down there, I didn't know that this was an issue. They brought it up.

Mr. STARR. Sir——

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And we sat them down in the room, and to think if it's fair. It's not safe. When I talk to the people who were there working in that facility, it's so dangerous they can't go outside.

Mr. STARR. I start every single day looking at the threats to our people worldwide.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. And you're getting Mexico wrong. You're getting Mexico wrong.

Mr. STARR. No, sir, I'm not. And I'll bring staff up and we'll work with your staff.

Chairman CHAFFETZ. Yeah, you can bring staff up all you want. I can tell you, I have been there. I have looked at those statistics. I have briefed with the people there. You cut their pay, and I think it's wrong. And I think people on both sides of this aisle think it's wrong.

It was petty. It was not useful. It was not productive. It's cut morale. It was unnecessary, and I think it should be changed. I really do. I really do. It's not for a lack of appropriation. It's the management of the State Department. That's the question here. That's the question.

We're going to continue to work on that. There are a lot of other issues. I do believe we have to engage in meaningful immigration reform. There has to be a legal, lawful way to get here. If you don't fix legal immigration, you're never, ever going to solve this problem. One of the issues we need to work on is the asylum reform. I actually have an asylum reform bill.

In conclusion, I cannot thank the men and women of the—particularly the Border Patrol for all they do and the good, hard work that they do. I have been down there. It's one of my joys to go out with them in the Ajo district. I've been out there with them as we chase people coming across the border. You sit there and just watch them all day long coming across, and these people apprehend them in a very professional manner. They work hard. It's hard, very dangerous work. Can't thank them enough for the good work that the people do in the Customs and Border Patrol.

ERO has an exceptionally difficult mission. ICE is doing some very important work. There are good people doing work all across the border.

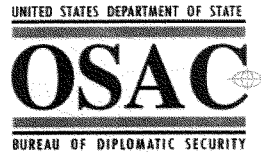
And my point, sir, is with those people working in the State Department, they too have a vital mission. And it's just unacceptable to us. It's just mind-boggling that there would knowingly and willingly cut their pay, telling them that it's more safe when there are conditions there that are not conducive. To say that, oh, they can just go across the border so they can get to a Dairy Queen, yeah, that doesn't cut it. That's not acceptable.

With that, I appreciate all of you for participating today. I think this was a good hearing. This hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:49 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Mexico 2015 Crime and Safety Report: Mexico City

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Threats; Stolen items; Narco-Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Kidnapping; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Burglary; Extortion; Drug Trafficking; Murder; Cargo Security; Earthquakes; Volcanoes; Hurricanes; Employee Health Safety; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Economic Espionage

Western Hemisphere > Mexico; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Mexico City

2/13/2015

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

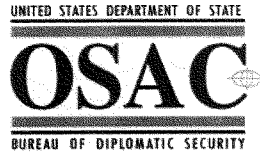
The Department of State divides its roles and responsibilities in Mexico among 10 consular districts spread across Mexico. This Crime and Safety Report focuses on the Embassy's district, which is composed of the Mexican Federal District that is Mexico City, the southern tip of Tamaulipas State and the following 13 states: Chiapas, Estado de Mexico, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz. For information regarding the security environment in other areas of Mexico, please reference the OSAC Crime and Safety Reports from the following Consular Districts: Tijuana, Nogales, Hermosillo, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Merida.

Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Crime varies widely. Armed robberies, kidnappings, car thefts, credit card fraud, and various forms of residential/street crime are daily concerns. The low rate of criminal convictions contributes to the high crime rate. Although there is no pattern of criminals specifically targeting foreign or American businesses or personnel, criminals will target anyone perceived as sufficiently lucrative and vulnerable. Criminals select victims based on an appearance of prosperity, vulnerability, or a lack of awareness. Theft of the vehicle's operating computer is a common crime, as is the theft of car sound systems. Although Mexico employs strict gun-control laws, criminals are usually armed with handguns (or knives).

Millions of Americans safely live, work, and take vacations in Mexico every year; however, organized criminal groups continue to produce significant levels of violence throughout parts of the country. Organized crime is common in many areas in Mexico. The northern half

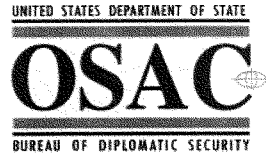


Mexico was considered a higher threat area, primarily due to organized criminal conflicts and competition for drug trafficking routes to the U.S. Recent statistics, however, show that violence is on the rise in central and southern states, particularly in Guerrero, Michoacán, and the State of Mexico. One common practice is for gangs to charge 'protection fees' or add their own tax to products and services with the threat of violence for those who fail to pay. Some criminal groups will mandate that individuals or even whole communities work for them as lookouts or couriers. Still others will threaten municipal and state level administrators into accepting corrupt practices. Beheadings, lynching, torture, and other gruesome displays of violence as well as high numbers of forced disappearances have become routine occurrences in various parts of the country, to include in the Mexico City metropolitan area. Numerous journalists and bloggers have been killed over the past few years for reporting on such incidents.

Mexico is experiencing a combination of conditions that collectively degrade the security environment in certain areas. The government has had recent successes in capturing some of its most wanted criminals; consequently, organized criminal groups are becoming much less organized and disciplined. Various groups have splintered into smaller gangs, which have branched out into different illegal business activities, and the associated violence is spreading across Mexico.

Foreign and American companies have been extorted and, some have been attacked for not responding to the criminals' demands.

Cargo theft remains a key area of concern for U.S. and foreign companies. FreightWatch International, a well-known company offering logistics security services, ranks the level of cargo crime in Mexico as "severe," its worst ranking, primarily because the supply chain continues to face threats from cargo criminals, corrupt law enforcement personnel, and, to a smaller extent, organized crime. Annual cargo theft incidents have been estimated at more than 5,000 per year, according to Mexico's Secretariat of Government, and FreightWatch has determined that cargo theft increased by about 14 percent between 2012 and 2013. The majority of stolen goods end up being resold in local markets, primarily in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara. Some U.S. company representatives complained in early August 2014 about the burden of cargo theft on manufacturing companies exporting to the U.S., saying they do not receive assistance from the government or law enforcement. Instead, companies are using the OSAC Country Council, the American Chamber of Commerce, and informal mechanisms to share information. This crime, while worrisome, is not preventing companies from operating in Mexico. While hijackings have declined in terms of the overall percentage of cargo theft incidents, railway attacks are becoming more commonplace, sources attribute to the rising price of raw materials (steel and copper) that are more often



transported via rail. In addition, sources have seen an increase in the theft of plastic moved via train that is attributed to the availability of molds for toy figurines that sell quickly in local markets. Consistent with previous FreightWatch reports, in the first quarter of 2014, the most common items targeted by cargo thieves was food, drinks, and building materials (primarily metals).

Areas of Concern

According to the Procuraduria General de Justicia del Distrito Federal and the Secretaria Publica del Distrito Federal, the following city boroughs routinely have the highest number of crimes reported in 2014: Iztapalapa, Cuauhtémoc, Gustavo A. Madero, Benito Juárez, Coyoacan, and Tlalpan.

The Embassy strictly controls U.S. government employees' travel to several parts of the Embassy's district, including the states of Guerrero and Michoacán.

FreightWatch considers the State of Mexico, Guanajuato, and Veracruz to be the three most dangerous states to transport cargo in Mexico.

Travel for U.S. government employees is closely scrutinized due to the ebb and flow of violence associated with organized criminal groups. For a state-by-state assessment, peruse the latest U.S. Department of State Travel Warning for Mexico at:
<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/mexico-travel-warning.html>

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions vary widely in cities and on the highways. The quality of road markings, signage, and street lighting is inconsistent. Accidents involving heavy trucks or buses are common on the highways, especially near urban areas with high volumes of commercial traffic. To reduce the risk of encountering criminal activity and accidents, you are strongly urged to travel only during daylight hours, to avoid isolated roads, and to use main highways and toll roads wherever possible.

If your tire is mounted on the outside of the vehicle, secure it in place with chain and padlock, or similar device. The installation of a car alarm is strongly recommended. Also, if you purchase a car radio, look for models that can be removed from the dash and locked in the trunk. Also, keep your vehicle sterile, storing anything that would entice a thief out of plain



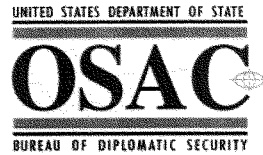
view. Replace two lug nuts on each wheel with specially keyed bolts that locks or can only be removed with a special attachment to the tire iron. Try to avoid leaving your vehicle on the street. Try to park inside a residential compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least within view of the location of your visit. If this is not possible, leave your car at home and take a sitio taxi. When parking within a shopping facility lot, be sure to park as close as possible to the store entrance but away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles. Be sure to lock your doors, close windows and hide shopping bags and gifts in the trunk, out of sight. The installation of a car alarm is a recommended precaution in deterring vehicle thefts and thefts of interior contents.

Before embarking on a road trip, ensure that your vehicle is in good operating condition, paying particular attention to the engine, tires, brakes, head/tail lights, spare tire/jack, horn, and fluid levels. On longer trips to remote areas, try to travel with other vehicles and advise someone of your travel plans (including anticipated arrival and departure times and contact numbers). The following items are recommended for extended road trips: water; cellular telephone with charger (although some areas between cities lack coverage); maps and a GPS device; spare tire; first aid kit; fire extinguisher; jumper cables; flares/reflectors; emergency tool kit; and a commercially available 406 beacon, if traveling in remote rural locations.

Public Transportation Conditions

The Embassy does not recommend using "libre" taxis, as they are poorly regulated and often criminally-linked enterprises that pick up fares on the street after being hailed by customers. "Sitio" or radio dispatched taxis are far safer, more reliable, and are worth the added expense. These types of taxis cannot be hailed off the street and must be ordered by phone or met at a designated taxi stand. To request a taxi, call, or have the merchant you are visiting call, a radio dispatched "sitio" taxi. Twenty-four hour radio taxi service is available at 5516-6020 and 3626-9800 to 30. "Sitio" taxis in Mexico City are most often metered and registered by the government. "Sitio" taxis from Benito Juarez International Airport are paid in advance in the terminal (at the "sitio" stands) and are well regulated. In addition, the Embassy permits car services that can be requested online via phone/tablet applications, which allow consumers to verify the driver and vehicle number, such as Uber, Yaxi, Lift, etc.

Visitors should travel by intercity bus only during daylight hours and only by first-class conveyance whenever possible. Although there have been several reports of bus hijackings and robberies on toll roads, buses on toll roads have experienced a lower rate of incidents than buses (second- and third-class) that travel on less secure, "libre" highways. Bus travel through Tamaulipas is especially hazardous. Public and private passenger buses traveling



through Tamaulipas are sometimes targeted by organized criminal groups that take all passengers hostage and demand ransom payments.

In Mexico City, municipal buses and the Metro (subway) are generally safe to use. Non-municipal buses ("micros") are not well regulated and are not recommended. City buses and the Metro may be crowded, and passengers should be on the alert for pickpockets and other thieves, especially on the most crowded, busiest routes during rush hour. Passengers should take care to protect their belongings and valuables. There have been occasional reports of significant security incidents (apart from theft) on tourist buses in and around Mexico City and to nearby tourist destinations. Buses from Mexico City to the pyramids of Teotihuacan have been stopped and all passengers robbed. The Country Specific Information for Mexico (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html#traffic_safety) has a comprehensive section on traffic/roads.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

There are plenty of air connections within Mexico, and the Embassy recommends that its employees fly, rather than drive, to many destinations.

Other Travel Conditions

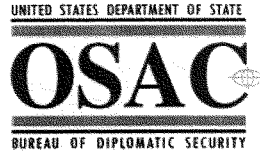
The government has deployed federal police and military personnel as part of its effort to combat organized criminal groups. U.S. citizens traveling on Mexican roads and highways may encounter government checkpoints, which are often staffed by military personnel. You are advised to cooperate with personnel at government checkpoints and mobile military patrols. Criminal organizations have been known to erect their own unauthorized checkpoints and have killed or abducted motorists who fail to stop at them. Likewise, self-defense groups have established checkpoints in their communities and have shot and wounded travelers who fail to stop. When approaching a checkpoint, regardless of whether it is official or non-official, cooperate and avoid any actions that may be perceived to be suspicious or aggressive.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political Violence Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The government remained vigilant against domestic and foreign terrorist threats in 2014. The U.S. Embassy/Consulates are focused on Mexico as a potential transit country for foreign



terrorist groups to conduct operations against the U.S. There are no known foreign terrorist organizations operating in Mexico, and there is no evidence that any terrorist group has targeted U.S. citizens in Mexican territory. Mexico does not provide a safe haven to terrorists or terrorist groups. The government passed amendments to its Federal Penal Code that strengthened the country's legal framework to address acts of terrorism, including terrorist financing. Authorities cooperate well with relevant U.S. government agencies on persons of interest. Criminal organizations have used terror-like tactics (car bombs and grenades) to attack each other and security forces. They also commit gruesome acts of violence designed to terrorize; however, the effects of these acts seem directed largely at rival gangs.

Terrorism Rating: Low

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

American interests in Mexico City are generally not targets of political violence. Peaceful demonstrations of all sizes gather regularly at the Monument to Independency (the Angel) near the U.S. Embassy, to protest government policies, labor, and social issues, and, occasionally, U.S. policies. These protests often affect traffic during peak commute hours on and near Paseo de La Reforma, the city's primary avenue passing in front of the U.S. Embassy.

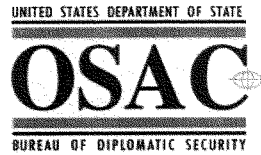
Civil Unrest

Most demonstrations are peaceful; however, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful may turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Demonstrators frequently block city streets, major highways, or take control of government toll roads on major highways and may demand unofficial tolls from travelers. Recently, groups associated with teachers' unions and those protesting recent alleged human rights violations in the State of Guerrero have used checkpoints as a way of raising money for their causes. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid areas of demonstrations and to exercise caution if in the vicinity of any protests.

The Constitution prohibits political activities by foreigners; such actions may result in detention and/or deportation. Travelers should avoid political demonstrations and other activities that might be deemed political.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards



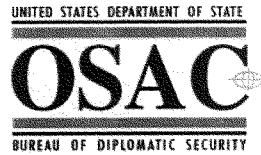
In 1985, Mexico City was hit by one of the most devastating earthquakes in the history of the Americas. The earthquake measured 8.1. According to official government statistics, at least 9,000 people were killed, 30,000 injured, and 100,000 left homeless. Over 400 buildings were destroyed and over 3,000 seriously damaged. The government expects that another significant earthquake could occur at any time. Although there have been substantial improvements in building regulations and response planning, there is no guarantee that there would not be significant damage, injuries and loss of life again. On April 18, 2014, central Mexico was rocked by a 7.5 earthquake. Then on May 8, 2014, a 6.4 earthquake was registered in Guerrero, 171 miles southwest of Mexico City. Earthquakes within the Embassy's consular districts are routine, especially in the Pacific coast states.

Volcanoes, both active and dormant, are scattered throughout central Mexico. One of the country's largest volcanoes, Popocatepetl, is only 43 miles southeast of Mexico City and has had several low-level eruptions in the past several of years. Travelers should be aware that the government prevents access to the mountain and has closed it to climbers and hikers. According to public safety officials, travelers to the area should have N-95 filter masks available in case ash falls on them. Clouds of ash associated with volcanic activity can limit air travel and make evacuation by air difficult. On December 17 2014, there were three explosions from the Popocatepetl volcano that resulted in the volcano alert system being raised to "Yellow Phase 2." This did not require evacuations, but the Puebla International Airport closed that morning as a precautionary measure. A similar yellow alert was raised when the Colima volcano in Jalisco had some eruptions on January 5, 2015. Ash reached seven municipalities in Jalisco, but there were no evacuations.

From June to November, hurricanes may affect the Pacific and Gulf coasts of the Embassy's consular district. The coastal states tend to receive the brunt of these storms; however, hurricanes and tropical storms have caused flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the district. Travelers are advised to keep abreast of developing weather conditions during the hurricane season and to avoid the paths of storms when possible.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

On August 6, 2014, 10 million gallons of mining process waste escaped from a containment basin of the Buenavista del Cobre mine operated by Grupo Mexico in northwest Mexico. The unintentional release of the mine waste (tailings) contaminated two Sonoran rivers and left 20,000 residents without drinking water. After the spill, the company took actions to neutralize the acidity of the water, but the long-term impacts to the sediment and the ground water from the heavy metals and other contaminants remain unclear. A week following that spill, an



unrelated gold mine in Durango also reported an accidental release of cyanide into a stream; this smaller release caused an environmental emergency but seems to be under control.

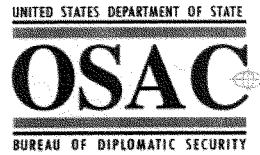
On January 31, 2013, there was a large explosion at the headquarters of Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) in Mexico City that left at least 37 dead and 126 wounded. In the official investigation report released by the government, the cause of the explosion was a buildup of dangerous gases ignited by an electrical spark.

For 2013, the Ministry of Labor (Secretaria del Trabajo y Prevision Social, STPS) and Institute of Social Security (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, IMSS) reported a total of 495,759 (closed) cases of industrial and transportation accidents, including work illnesses. The sectors with the highest reported rate of incidents were transportation and construction.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Mexico was listed on the Watch List in the 2014 Special 301 Report, which is the result of an annual review of the state of intellectual property rights protection and enforcement among U.S. trading partners around the world prepared annually by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) under Section 301 as amended of the Trade Act of 1974. The report noted inadequate IPR enforcement and the wide availability of pirated and counterfeit goods mostly via physical and virtual notorious markets. Criminal organizations are significantly involved in the counterfeit and pirated goods trade. Criminal enforcement efforts of intellectual property rights (IPR) suffers from weak coordination among federal, state, and municipal officials, limited resources for prosecutions, lack of long-term sustained investigations to target high-level suppliers of counterfeit and pirated goods, and the need for deterrent level penalties. The U.S. continues to encourage Mexico to provide its customs officials with ex-officio authority, allow the Attorney General Offices the authority to prosecute transshipments of alleged counterfeit and pirated goods, and to enact legislation to strengthen its copyright regime, including by implementing the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Internet Treaties by providing stronger protection against the unauthorized recording of motion pictures in theaters. The U.S. continues to work with Mexico to resolve IPR concerns through bilateral, regional, and other means of engagement.

Economic espionage activity is covered under misappropriation of trade secrets law in Mexico. The three sources of trade secrets law are the Industrial Property Law, Federal Criminal Code, and NAFTA, which provide fines and criminal penalties for misappropriation of trade secrets. There have been extremely limited prosecutions by authorities of trade secret misappropriation due to onerous legal requirements and evidentiary issues tied to proving



theft of digital files.

Drug-related Crimes

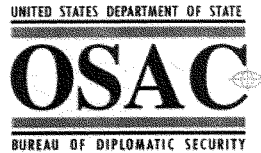
Although drug smuggling organizations have existed for decades, they became more powerful as control shifted away from Colombian cartels in the 1990s. Violence between rival organizations increased dramatically over the last decade, as they fought each other and the government for control of production areas, trafficking routes, and local markets.

Kidnapping Threat

The number of kidnappings reported throughout Mexico is of particular concern. The overall numbers of kidnapping incidents are difficult to determine because most of the cases are not reported to authorities. While kidnappings can occur anywhere, according to Mexican government statistics, Tamaulipas, Guerrero, Michoacán, Estado de Mexico, and Morelos recorded the highest kidnapping rates in the country in 2014. According to government statistics in 2013, kidnappings increased by 20 percent, compared with 2012. According to another government study, Mexico suffered an estimated 131,946 kidnappings (including traditional, virtual, and express kidnappings; of which only 1,698 were reported to the police) in 2013. Police (or former law enforcement officials) have been implicated in many of these incidents. The majority of cases reported to the U.S. Embassy have been kidnapping for ransom (KFR) cases, while the number of reported express kidnappings is low. There were 63 reported kidnapping events in Mexico City's consular district and over 200 incidents for all of Mexico with a U.S. nexus. These figures include U.S. citizens, Legal Permanent Residents, and cases in which the primary victim was neither a U.S. citizen nor a LPR, but in which an extortion call was made to U.S. citizen family members in the U.S.

During July and August 2014, the media reported that at least three gangs were operating in Valle de Bravo, and at least 10 kidnappings had taken place. As a result, in late August, a convoy of 350 members of the new military unit, National Gendarmerie, augmented security efforts. On September 2014, at least 17 alleged kidnappers were detained by Mexican police. The Mexican Attorney General's Office, Procuraduria General de Justicia (PGJ), stated that most, if not all, of the kidnappers belonged to an organized crime group from Michoacán.

In some KFR cases, a ransom is paid, and the victim set free, but in other cases the victims are killed despite having paid a ransom. The general practice on the part of the victim's family or friends is not to notify authorities, as the popular belief is that the police may be involved in the crime or are unable to resolve the situation. Affluent residents in Mexico City often have



bodyguards and armored vehicles for their families to prevent them from being kidnapped.

Express kidnappings are based on the 24-hour withdrawal limit placed on ATM cards industry-wide. A common modus operandi for express kidnappings in Mexico City is: passengers using "libre" taxis are often robbed by two or three armed individuals who enter the taxi a few minutes into the trip, having been called or signaled by the driver. The passenger is held for a number of hours and released after a small ransom is paid or is shuttled to a series of ATMs and forced to withdraw funds. Express kidnapping victims are being held for 24 to 48 hours to maximize withdrawal amounts. Few official U.S. government employees have suffered this type of crime, but many Mexican employees of the Embassy either have been victimized themselves or personally know a victim. The term "express kidnapping" is also applied to the kidnapping of random victims held for brief periods where only small ransom amounts are demanded. A typical scenario may last for several hours and may be settled for the peso-equivalent of a few hundred or thousand dollars.

There appears to be an uptick in "virtual kidnappings." These extortion telephone calls vary in style; however, the methodology is often the same: callers mention that they have kidnapped a loved one and often include a crying/pleading voice immediately after the call is answered and before the "kidnapper" gets on the phone. In this manner, they hope to confuse the victim and get them to give away important information. For example, if the crying voice sounds like the target's child and the target calls out that child's name, the caller knows the name of the child, who could be a kidnap victim, and will use this knowledge against the target. The voice of the "victim" will usually be crying and/or hysterical, making it difficult to identify and increase the likelihood that the victim will believe it is their loved one. Criminals will try to use fear and timing against victims. For example, they plan their calls to coincide with times when it will be difficult to contact the victim immediately (e.g. when children are on their way to/from school). Or, the callers will obtain two cell phones of two family members. They will call both victims at the same time and claim to have kidnapped the other relative. They will use fear and the threat of violence to keep both victims on the line while they urge them to pay a "ransom." Once the kidnappers are satisfied they have obtained as much money as they can, they end the call, leaving both family members poorer and confused. They may demand that the ransom be delivered in person, which may then turn into a real kidnapping, or that the money be sent electronically. Other variations on this scam use callers who claim to be lawyers or police looking to help get one of the target's family members out of jail (or some other bad situation). They pressure the target to pay them to waive charges or to bribe alleged corrupt officials in order to free their loved one and avoid a long and expensive judicial process. Virtual kidnapping/extortion calls are made to both Mexican and external numbers and often use information obtained from social networking websites. Another variation that travelers staying at hotels as guests have reported is an extortion-by-deception scheme wherein a



victim is contacted by phone and convinced to isolate themselves from family and friends until a ransom is paid. The victim is coerced (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family or loved ones. The victim's family is then contacted and a ransom for the "kidnapped" extracted. Often times, the callers will make statements to suggest surveillance such as: "we saw you at the school with your truck." This is very vague but implies they have been watching the victim's family and using fear and everyday routines against them to reinforce the threat of the kidnapping.

Police Response

Tourists should be wary of persons representing themselves as police officers or other officials. When in doubt, ask for identification. Be aware that offering a bribe to a public official to avoid a ticket or other penalty is a crime. U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with the police if stopped or questioned.

In its efforts to heighten security, the government has deployed security forces to various parts of the country as well as created a new military unit known as the National Gendarmerie to augment security in certain areas of Mexico.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In some instances, U.S. citizens have become victims of harassment, mistreatment or extortion by law enforcement and other officials. Mexican authorities have cooperated in investigating some cases, but one must have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint effectively. Employees are advised to note this information if they ever have a problem with police or other officials.

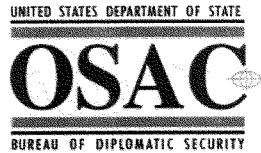
Crime Victim Assistance

Travelers may contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City for assistance in dealing with the police. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, one may be required to accompany the investigating officer to the local police station to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, a nominal fee will be charged.

Host Nation Police Emergency: 066 (similar to 911 in the U.S.)

Fire Department: 068

Ambulance: 065 (Red Cross)



Consejo Ciudadano de Seguridad Publica y Procuracion de Justicia del Distrito Federal (in Mexico City, takes complaints from those afraid to go to the police): 5533-5533

Police/Security Agencies

Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) - Office of the Mexican Attorney General is responsible for investigating and prosecuting federal crimes.

Secretary of Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) - Oversees Federal Police forces. The Federal Police are approximately 38,000 strong and are present in all Mexican states. Oversees the Mexican Immigration Service (INAMI), whose officers have the right to detain suspected undocumented aliens and, under certain conditions, may deport them without formal deportation proceedings.

Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público) - Customs officers (Aduana) are deployed at borders and at international airports to interdict contraband entering Mexico.

The Bank of Mexico (Banco de México) - Operates its own security division, which is charged with enforcing banking and monetary laws, including cases of counterfeiting, fraud, and money laundering.

Procuraduria General de Justicia (PGJ) - Local Mexican Attorney in each state/city, in charge of investigating and prosecuting state and local crimes.

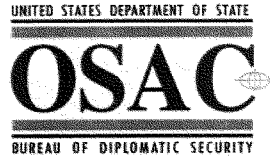
State Police - Each of the country's 31 states and the Federal District maintain both preventive and judicial police. State police are under the direction of the state's governor.

Municipal Police - Each state contains numerous municipalities and within each municipality exist a municipal police force.

Military Forces - Over the last seven years, the Mexican Army and Navy have been heavily involved in anti-crime initiatives as they combat organized criminal groups.

Medical Emergencies

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of States Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, "Medical



Information for Americans Traveling Abroad," available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

ABC HOSPITAL (OBSERVATORIO)
 Sur 136 No. 116 Col. Las Américas,
 01120 México, D.F.
 Tel: 5230-8000

ABC HOSPITAL (SANTA FE)
 Av. Carlos Graef Fernández 154 (enter from Av. Vasco de Quiroga), Col. Tlaxala Santa Fe,
 Cuajimalpa, 05300 México, D.F.
 Tel: 1103-1600; Emergencies: 1103-1666 (Spanish)

HOSPITAL ESPANOL
 EJÉRCITO NACIONAL #613, G No. 613, Granada, Col. Polanco, (Miguel Hidalgo)
 11520 México, D.F.
 Tel: 5255-9600

HOSPITAL ANGELES DE LAS LOMAS
 AV, VIALIDAD DE LA BARRANCA No. 22, Col. Valle de Las Palmas
 52763 Huixquilucan, Edo. De México
 Tel: 5246-5000, Emergencies: 5246-5092, 5246-5093

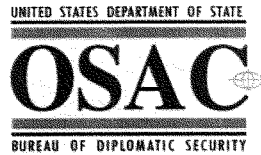
Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The RSO does not endorse any specific private insurance or air ambulance company. The following list is for informational purposes only:
 Advanced Air Ambulance 800-633-3590 or 305-232-7700
 Air Ambulance Professionals 800-752-4195 or 954-730-9300

Recommended Insurance Posture

For international treatment and medical insurance, see:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1470.html

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance



For vaccine and health guidance, please visit the CDC International Traveler's hotline - 24 hour info available at 800-232-4636 or <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mexico>.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

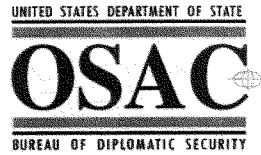
Scams

To reduce the likelihood of receiving a virtual kidnapping call: Answer the phone with "hello" and make the other person ask for you by name; Know the details of your family's travel and location (where they are supposed to be, who they are supposed to be with, etc.) and contact information (land-line and cell phone numbers); Never provide personal information to someone who calls or approaches you; and Do not post personal information on social networking sites.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors should be familiar with the Department's latest travel warning for Mexico, use strong personal security practices and recognize that crime can occur in any place and at any time. Maintain a low profile: Do not advertise the fact that you are American. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself with your actions. Vary your routine: Be unpredictable in your movements, vary your routes from home to the office as well as your departure and arrival times. Be alert to possible surveillance: Note any individual who appears out of place along your routes to regularly scheduled activities, such as going from home to office. Be alert to your surroundings: Minimize valuables and do not carry large sums of money while in crowded, urban areas. Be aware of popular scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention.

Exercise caution when utilizing credit or debit cards in ATM or dubious locales. There are numerous reports in which U.S. citizens have had their card numbers "skimmed" and the money in their debit accounts stolen or their credit cards fraudulently charged ("Skimming" is the theft of credit card information by an employee of a legitimate merchant or bank, manually copying down numbers or using a magnetic stripe reader, or using a camera and skimmer installed in an ATM). In addition to skimming, the risk of physical theft of credit or debit cards also exists. To prevent such theft, the Embassy recommends that travelers keep close track of their personal belongings when out and about and that they only carry what they need. Make copies of what you carry so if victimized the credit cards can be cancelled quickly. If travelers choose to use credit cards, they should regularly check their account status to



ensure its integrity. Try to use ATMs in bank branches during business hours.

Wearing expensive jewelry, watches, and displays of large amounts of cash draw unwanted attention. Jewelry, especially expensive watches, and cellular phones can be sold easily in vast illegal markets. Avoid wearing jewelry, especially watches that are or appear expensive. Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended. When grocery shopping always carry your purse with you. Never leave it in your cart, even for a few seconds.

When hiring domestic help, vet them by identifying references. Ensure that they are trained not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access of workers without prior authorization.

Mitigating the cargo theft risk is possible by taking the proper precautions, such as avoiding highways known to be dangerous for cargo, using high-tech locks, and avoiding driving at night, according to FreightWatch.

One simple way to lessen one's chances of becoming a victim of street crime in Mexico City is to avoid the use of "libre" taxi cabs.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

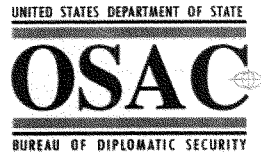
Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Mexico City
Paseo de la Reforma, 305
Col. Cuauhtémoc
Mexico, D.F. 06500

Business hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM-5:30 PM

Embassy Contact Numbers

Mexico country code: 52
Mexico City area code: 55
Telephone - 5080-2000 (24/7 switchboard operator)
Regional Security Office: 5080-2000 ext. 2400
Medical Unit: 5080-2400 ext. 2800
Consular Affairs: 5080-2000, ext. 4440 (after hours request duty officer via switchboard)



Political Section: 5080-2000 ext. 2052
 Economic Section: 5080-2000 ext. 2999 or 2699
 Website: <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate Ciudad Juarez: <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Guadalajara: <http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Hermosillo: <http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Matamoros: <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Merida: <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Monterrey: <http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Nogales: <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Nuevo Laredo: <http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>
 Consulate Tijuana: <http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

It is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including local contact information and expected date of return, with a friend or family member, as well as sign up for the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program.

Country-specific information regarding Mexico is provided at
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html#medical.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Department of State supports an active OSAC Country Council, with a membership of 90 companies. For information on OSAC and future OSAC Mexico City events, contact Ms. Janet Salgado at 5080-2000, ext. 4918. For more information, contact the Regional Security Office at U.S. Embassy Mexico City at 5080-2400 or OSAC's Western Hemisphere team at OSACWHA@state.gov. Visit the council online at:
<http://mexicocity.osac.gov/http://mexicocity.osac.gov> or <http://www.osac.gov>.

EMBAJADA DE MÉXICO

Washington, DC.
September 8th, 2015

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
United States House of Representatives
2230 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cummings,

I am writing you regarding the upcoming hearing of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform titled "U.S. Violence on the Border: Keeping U.S. Personnel Safe".

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that the Government of Mexico is fully committed to the security of our shared border region and has been working and collaborating with U.S. agencies in this and many other issues of mutual interest.

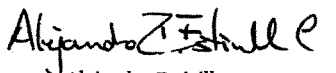
In this regard, we acknowledge and appreciate the work that you have been doing to address the constant flow of illegal firearms from the U.S. into Mexico. As you pointed out in your June 2011 report, illegal firearms is one of the elements that fuel violence in Mexico and the U.S. A recent report released by ATF found that 71.9% of traceable weapons recovered in Mexico in Calendar Year 2014 were sourced from the U.S.

Transborder criminal organizations (TCO) are the main beneficiaries of the illegal flow of firearms through our borders. This flow has allowed TCO to obtain firepower that in some cases rivals the capabilities of police forces in Mexico, forcing Mexican law enforcement agencies at all levels to extraordinarily foster their operation protocols in order to be able to confront and neutralize the threat that TCO's represent for the societies of both our countries.

It is clear that more needs to be done to tackle this shared problem. As Mexico has stated for many years, Congress can play a very important role in combating these TCO's and the flow of illegal firearms by enacting proper legislation. The Government of Mexico truly appreciates the efforts that you have been doing in this issue, and recognizes in you an example of commitment and binational collaboration to find a solution to this complex issue. The Embassy of Mexico looks forward to continue working with you in this or any other matter related to both our countries.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to convey to you the assurance of my high esteem and consideration.

Sincerely,


Alejandro Estivill
Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.

**Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney
Statement for the Record:
Oversight and Government Reform Committee Hearing “Violence on the Border:
Keeping U.S. Personnel Safe”**

Today, Members of this Committee and Representatives from both sides of the aisle came together to address the gun trafficking epidemic that has spread across our country and across our borders. I would like to thank Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings for holding this important hearing.

According to the ATF, more than 100,000 guns were recovered from crime scenes in Mexico between 2009 and 2014, and over 70 percent of those originated in the U.S. It's clear that gun trafficking across the border to Mexico is a major national security threat, but our current laws are so weak that it's not worth it to prosecute gun traffickers.

And that threat doesn't stop at the border. Gun trafficking is a major problem all across the country. And all across country – the overwhelming majority of Americans, including gun owners, support making common sense policy changes that will keep guns out of the hands of criminals and make our country, and our border, safer.

The Gun Trafficking Prevention Act, which I introduced along with Ranking Member Cummings and Representatives Meehan, Fitzpatrick, Kelly, King, Duckworth, and Donovan, will create a dedicated federal statute to combat gun trafficking, and impose stiffer penalties for “straw purchasers” who buy guns for convicted felons and others who are prohibited from purchasing weapons. The bill also includes important enhancements for organizers of trafficking networks that funnel illegal guns into cities across the country.

These stronger penalties will enable law enforcement and prosecutors to bust these trafficking rings and make our communities safer from the threat of gun violence.

In testimony before this Committee in 2012, ATF Special Agent Peter Forcelli called the current laws against gun trafficking “absolutely toothless.” And the consequences have been dire:

On Christmas Eve, 2012, a convicted felon named William Spengler, who served 17 years in prison for killing his 92-year-old grandmother with a hammer, sat down in his home in Webster, N.Y., and wrote a note vowing to torch his neighborhood.

He promised to “do what I like doing best, killing people.” After setting fire to his own house and several others, Spengler ambushed the first responders, killing two firefighters by spraying them with bullets from a 12-gauge shotgun and a Bushmaster rifle.

How did Mr. Spengler—a convicted felon—get his guns? He used his neighbor as a straw purchaser.

And this May, authorities in New York charged 10 people in a gun trafficking ring that had channeled 90 guns from as far away as Maine onto our streets in just the previous six months.

Our legislation will address this crisis head-on, and help ensure that law enforcement has the tools it needs to keep illegal guns off of our streets.

This bill has widespread support from the law enforcement community including, among others, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, and the Major Cities Chiefs Association.

Thank you to Ranking Member Cummings and Representatives Meehan, Fitzpatrick, Kelly, King, Duckworth, and Donovan for their steadfast commitment to end gun trafficking, and their support of this critical legislation.